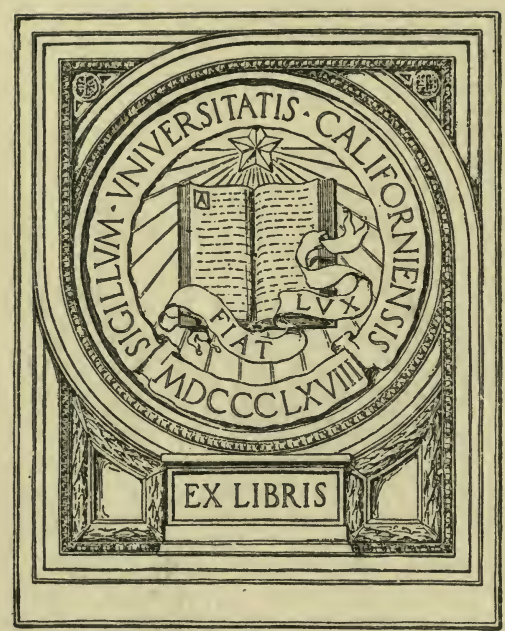
MEMORIES
OF
VICTORIAN
LONDON

L. B. WALFORD



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The Author in 1864.

LONDON EDWARD ARNOLD

MEMORIES OF VICTORIAN LONDON

BY

L. B. WALFORD

AUTHOR OF
'MR. SMITH,' 'COUSINS,' 'RECOLLECTIONS OF A SCOTTISH NOVELIST'
ETC.

WITH PORTRAIT

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD
1912

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Grey, grimy London—dearer far to me
Than snowy Alp, or blue Tyrrhenian sea,—
Despite the clangour of thy thronging ways,—
Despite the shadow of thy murky haze,—
'Spite thy bewildering grasp of mighty space,
And the long miles that stretch from place to place,—
'Spite the sly growth of suburb, peopling o'er
Landscape once fair, that shall be so no more,—
'Spite every grievance that's against thee hurled,
There is no second London in the world!

L. B. W.

PREFACE.

May I dare to hope that a few words of preface to this book of "Memories" will hold my readers' attention for a moment, as it is very necessary that they should be written?

In my former volume of "Recollections," no reference was made to certain episodes which must always rank among the great days of my life, yet which did not fit in with the general tenor of that book.

They had an interest all their own. They could not be dismissed with a passing tribute. They merited more—much more. They haunted me in many a lonely Highland glen, or by the waters of some lapping lake—and the time seems now come when they can be put on record.

For it was my happy fate to be from time to time, from early youth onwards, the guest of a beloved relation, to me as a sister, in her London home, where she was the centre of a singularly attractive circle.

Albeit a rich and handsome young married woman with abundance of energy and leisure, she cared nothing for gay society, but sought and was sought by many either already prominent in the world of letters, or destined to become so. Her endearing personality and charm of manner captivated all she came across—and they were of varied excellence, for her tastes were eclectic, and she could appreciate equally the scientist, the poet, the painter, the musician—the anybody, in short, gifted with

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a *mind.* It should be added that her position enabled her to obtain the society of such without there being a suspicion of lion-hunting, which was entirely foreign to her nature.

To her I owe much that has enabled me to write these "Memories"—for her journal-letters, sent off red-hot from the scenes she described to a sick friend, long since dead, are in my hands at this moment—(together with her full permission, ere she too died, to make what use of them I chose).

These letters are absolutely truthful, absolutely reliable; they were penned without a thought of publication—and of course have had to be carefully sifted, in consequence; but they have been of inestimable value to me, as supplementing my own crude impressions and correcting a too exuberant imagination.

It is not necessary to give the full name of one known to so many at the time—and to a few still—as simply "Mary"; so as "Mary" she shall appear in these pages.

To her near and dear young relations, in their full and busy life of to-day, I owe a special debt of gratitude for the stores placed at my disposal, confident that no "Memories" of mine are needed to keep green the remembrance of their beloved father's sister within their hearts.

To a contemporary relation also, most affectionately regarded by her, my best thanks are due for his kind assistance in laying this "stone on her cairn."

Otherwise I have built it unaided—and in consideration of this, humbly beg to be forgiven all deficiencies.

L. B. WALFORD.

September, 1912.

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It was a glorious June morning, and the London season was in full swing in the year 1864, at which date these Memories begin.

A party of travellers had arrived by the night-train from Scotland; and albeit they had hired a saloon-carriage for the occasion—(deemed at that period a necessity for a family party)—they were dusty and shabby, the ladies being particularly disfigured by reason of their wearing their oldest clothes, as was then the custom.

No one going by train thought of being neat and trim; still less of having any specially designed costume;—and the useful coat and skirt we all now wear was not in existence.

No, we could be exquisitely attired for gala days, and "nice" in ordinary life—but we did, I fear we did, make frights of ourselves when *en route*.

And it must be said for us that the travelling conditions of the sixties almost warranted this. The smoke and grime were fearful. My sisters and I took the precaution of tying up our heads in pocket-handkerchiefs ere they touched the cushions of the compartments even in the day-time, and washed our hair directly we reached our destination.

As some of us wore our hair in curls—long, thick curls, hanging over our shoulders—perhaps this was wise ; but when we moved about on various visits among our southern relations, we did seem to be forever washing our hair.

To return to that June morning in the metropolis.

I can see it now, the brightness, the gaiety, the bustle on every side. Peering from the open windows of our battered and straw-bottomed cab, (the term "four-wheeler" was not, I think, invented then,) it seemed such a world of life and motion that, though the sight was hardly a new one, we were freshly impressed—perhaps for the following reason. Hitherto we younger daughters of the house had been despatched out of Town immediately on our arrival in it. We had been sent straight down to the country, there to abide while our elders disported themselves in the gay world.

But now things were to be changed. We also were to have a part in this wonderful "Season" of which we had before only heard, and we were bubbling over with anticipation and exhilaration.

We were, it is true, a little ashamed of our appearance, and instinctively shrank out of sight when our heavily loaded vehicle, rumbling along at a snail's pace, pulled up for a moment alongside a barouche full of ladies in a "block."

We hoped these beautiful visions in their enchanting toilettes would not look at us,—and as they did not, took heart of grace and stared breathlessly at them.

Although it was an unearthly hour (to our view) for splendour, the four damsels, all of them quite young, were faultlessly arrayed in bright-hued robes of French muslin, the latest thing in fashion,—and in their delicately gloved hands, they one and all held white parasols.

White parasols, with long white fringes gently swaying in the morning breeze! How lovely—how divine! From that moment the possession of a white parasol with a crinkled fringe became my ambition.

And it seemed to strike the note, as it were, of the music we were about to hear. To be going about at ten o'clock a.m., with so elegant an adjunct superadded to all the rest, produced an effect of devil-may-care extravagance and recklessness that fairly made our hearts leap in our bosoms.

Nor were we to be disappointed—even now I am glad to remember that. Even now I rejoice to recall the glamour, the witchery of that glorious summer, and through the long vista of years behold the sights and scenes—some of them simple enough and common enough—that so charmed my youthful fancy nearly fifty years ago.

London then was a very different London from what it is now. Already so much has been written and said on this head, however, that I have no need to add my quota, but will confine myself to noting down something of the daily life we ourselves led in the London season, as it then was; of the scenes we took part in, and the people we went among,—and let my readers perceive for themselves the changes Time has wrought.

No sooner were we safely installed in the house which was to be our home for the time being, than the fun of the fair began. We were hurried to our rooms, (how youth loves to be hurried and hustled on such occasions!) and desired to fly into fresh attire, as there was something in the Park—was it a Coaching Meet, I wonder?—anyhow it was *something* which our kind hosts thought would amuse us, and not a moment was to be lost in making ready for it.

Now, imagine how delightful that was! No time to be wasted in stupid sitting about and "resting" after our journey. We did not want to rest, not we. We had hardly been able to eat the breakfast thoughtfully prepared, and started up the moment we were free.

As for unpacking, luckily our maid, one "Ross," youthful as ourselves, and to the full as much excited by the new turn of events, had our trunks open in a trice ; and somewhat awed perhaps by all she saw, and foresaw, prepared us for the fray without a syllable of demur.

She may have thought in her heart that it was a queer thing to be gadding about in such fine clothes at that hour of the morning, but a Scotchwoman generally knows when to hold her tongue. We were equipped in peace, and flew downstairs.

Before the door stood a smart pony-carriage with a pair of grey ponies, and our cousin—the cousin introduced in my Preface as "Mary"—was pulling on a pair of gauntletted gloves, while a whip-parasol lay on the hall-table.

Mary was in grey from head to foot, to match the ponies ; and nothing that I ever saw her in thereafter, not the richest robe of satin or brocade, became her better than that simple (but probably costly) suit of grey.

It stood out like a balloon, of course,—but then we all stood out like balloons, and would have thought shame of ourselves to do anything else,—and there was a little scarf upon her shoulders, and a hat upon her head such as Leech has made familiar to every eye—a grey hat, with soft, fleecy, grey feathers, like and yet not like those of to-day, —and with the glowing carmine in her cheeks, with her dark, brilliant eyes, and the glossy jet of her hair, we thought, and I still think, I have seen many a more beautiful but never a more striking countenance than that of my ever-dear Mary in her prime.

Her figure was tall and *svelte*, she was made for activity of body, and as this was united to activity of mind, all that she put into a day's work may perhaps be conjectured.

She tired out seven horses, (or I should say animals, since two were ponies,) daily, at this time. In case this may be doubted, I will tell how.

Being very early risers, she and her husband rode in the Park before breakfast, and yet they breakfasted at nine sharp. By eleven, the ponies came round ; and were on the trot till half-past one. A barouche, with a pair of high-steppers stood outside the door at three, and she was usually out till six,—while, to wind up, a brougham and pair bore her nightly to destinations often far afield—for, as will presently appear, the people whom she chose for friends and companions seldom lived in Mayfair.

They might—or they might not—it was all one to Mary. But as it was on the cards that she might have to hurry off to dine at Richmond, or Wimbledon, or goodness knows where, any evening, no matter where she had been in the day, she insisted on her steeds being quick-goers, so as to waste no time upon the road.

And one day she announced that she needed another carriage.

"What sort of carriage?" demanded her husband. He might be surprised, but never thought of protesting.

"A good, serviceable carriage," said she, "one that can let in a lot of air, and hold a lot of people."

"Do you mean a *van*?"

"No ; I don't mean a van," she laughed ; and continued, "A van would not answer the purpose at all. What I need is a carriage to take out other people. All sorts of people. Every day I should like to send someone or other driving ; to let them go where they will, and do what they will. I can't *take* them—especially now that I have these two dears with me,"—looking fondly at us, (and didn't we look fondly back at her?)—"besides, even if I could, they have their own business to get through, and calls to make. So, please, let me have a supplementary carriage and coachman, just for my friends' use?"

Well, of course she got it.

And now, I put it to my readers, do you, any of you know another person who has done the like of this?

The inevitable answer I anticipate; Which of us *can*? That is true enough; there are but few, very few, who have it in their power to keep a "Supplementary" carriage at the disposal of their less fortunate acquaintance, but *would* they, if they could? Would they ever think of such a thing? It has always seemed to me that of all the kindly acts—kindly, not charitable, not benevolent, nor philanthropic, but merely kindly—that has come beneath my ken, this takes first place.

Every morning, the loan of this equipage, a spacious landau, of a sober order, as doubtless befitted its occupants, was offered to some humble invalid, or stranger, or foreigner, in short anybody unable to afford the luxury,—offered, moreover, in good time, and with no reservations,—and we constantly passed it, full to the brim,—and were hailed by happy, smiling countenances, upon whom Mary beamed in return. It taught us a lesson.

* * * * * * * * *

Well, away we went to the Park on that first day; but the remainder of it is so mixed up with visions of other days of the kind, that it does not stand out distinctly to memory.

Probably we went to parties in the afternoon, differently dressed, and seated aloft in the barouche, with its very low sides, over which our airy summer robes frothed and billowed. No one sees the pretty season draperies now, as they used to be seen. We were on view all over, as it were.

And on our heads we did not don the immense hats of to-day,—and pretty as these are, they do not reveal the pretty faces beneath, as our "Baby-bonnets" did. We wore—let me see—I think the head-gear I fancied most was a very tiny cap-bonnet of turquoise-blue crêpe, with a single large tea-rose at the side, and strings of soft, blue silk, tied in a bow beneath the chin—while from the back depended a gauze or net veil down to the waist.

Now blue was not *the* colour that year; "mauve" was the colour, and that to such an extent that the eye wearied of the everlasting tint.

Presently we had demonstration of this by the cheers of the Oxford undergraduates, when we went down to that ancient city for "Commem." With blushes on our cheeks we heard them shout "Hurrah! for the ladies in pink! —Hurrah! for the ladies in blue!"—and tried not to look conscious,—succeeding however but badly, I fear, —especially as Mary would nudge us, and laugh at us, openly enjoying our confusion, since she was not in blue herself.

* * * * * * * * *

If we did not go to afternoon "At Home's," it was a case of Gunter's for ices.

Tea in those days was not the universal necessity it has since become, and there were no regular tea-shops. What economical folks did I cannot say; probably Want was their Master, as the nursery phrase is,—but our fairy godmother took us straight to Gunter's, and we drew up in the cool shade of the gardens opposite.

Berkeley Square was umbrageous then as now, and it was the custom for advantage to be taken of the overhanging branches of the trees, and form a line of vehicles facing the great confectioner's shop, the horses' heads turned outwards.

There we sat, and sipped peach ices—unequalled by any other ices in the world. And as we were invariably thirsty afterwards, water was brought out to us, bedewing the tumblers. We preferred water to anything else—Gunter's water at least; and we liked our gallants to come and stand beside the carriage, and—but no matter—no matter.

Between the various "Shows" of Victorian London and those of the present day, I do not see the change I note in many other quarters. They have, of course, multiplied and developed, but as regards drawing pleasure-crowds, they remain much the same. We went to Flower Shows, Exhibitions, Concerts, and Promenades. We drove to Hurlingham, to Wimbledon, to the Crystal Palace, to Kew Gardens, and would fain have attended Ascot, but—ah! thereby hangs a tale.

My eldest brother, then in the 4th Dragoon Guards, quartered at Aldershot, appeared one morning—a dazzling morning it was, when all the world was bathed in sunshine—and announced that he had come to take me to Ascot. Me, his youngest sister, ten years his junior, and ten times over his worshipper! The prospect took my breath away.

And Mary would have let me go at once; she was broad-minded in all respects, and her sympathetic countenance was radiant as she looked at mine,—but oh, unhappy me! there were other and higher authorities in the house at the moment, and no persuasion could prevail on them to think that even for once in a way Races were lawful for the "Young person."

My brother was, of course, his own master; and it was very dear and kind of him to wish to give his sister the treat,—but as far as the treat itself was concerned, they were adamant, and with a sickening heart I watched the combat draw to its fatal close. He left the house alone, and I have never been to Ascot races to this day!

* * * * * * * * *

As regarded balls and theatres, we participated but sparingly in those delights at all times, and had been warned that they would have to be foregone while under our host's roof. He held strict views on such subjects, and so cheerfully did his wife submit her will to his, that we never thought of enquiring whether she shared them or not?

A word here as to a certain mild dissipation, for I can call it by no other name, much in vogue in serious circles at this period, namely, Drawing-room Meetings, held usually in the afternoon.

Laurence Oliphant has sharply, and I venture to think truly criticised these in his little gem, "Piccadilly," and I speak from experience.

They abounded during my first London season. The procedure was on this wise. An attraction similar to "Joseph Caribee Islands" was selected as a sort of *Star*—one of these, especially popular, being a certain Yusuf Shakoor, a presumable convert from heathendom—and his name was printed on the invitation cards. A fashionable penitent might or might not then be added as an extra "draw"—but anyhow the black man was a host in himself.

He was announced to address the meeting, supported by such well-known noblemen and gentlemen—if possible, public characters—as were obtainable by the host or hostess. The names of the speakers most in request will readily recur to elderly people of to-day.

The drawing-room was then set out much as it would be for a concert or conjuror; and programmes were printed, and handed to the guests on arrival.

Whether the hostess usually remained in the hall, or at the head of the stairs, I do not know; but on one occasion in which we took part she did, and thus addressed us out of the kindness of her heart; "My dears, do not go inside there! It is terribly, frightfully hot; there is not a seat to be had; and Lord Oncleton is praying, and he never knows *when* to leave off. Go into the dining-room, and get some strawberries, and ices. And when the meeting is over, you shall have a nice game of croquet in the garden."

We thanked her—but we went inside. We wanted to hear Mr. Stevenson Blackwood ("Adonis" Blackwood) speak. We had seen him in the Park, and who that ever saw that noble countenance could forget it?

Nor have I yet forgotten what that speaker said. He took for his text the words of Cornelius the Centurion to St. Peter: "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee by God."

But *were* we all there so present, with such an aim? Young as I was, I recognised, alas! the truth. The address was deeply impressive, the speaker was wholly in earnest, and the audience, consisting chiefly of females—fanned themselves.

A huge, feathered fan kept waving backwards and forwards just in front of me, and behind it the heavy, powdered face of a bewigged and bedizened dowager drowsily sank upon her bosom. One and all turned to each other with relief unconcealed when at length the meeting was over.

No wonder that the tone of a remark I overheard by-and-by was melancholy. No wonder that the pious soul who breathed it, sighed. "Well, I don't know," murmured he, with troubled eyes, "I really don't know that, when all's said and done, much good comes of all this praying with princesses."

"And I don't know either," rejoined his wife, briskly, "I very much don't know." She was one of the more mundane sort, frankly human, with a strong sense of humour, and her eyes were twinkling, not sad. "To tell the truth," she continued, "I have had my new lace parasol taken to-day, and at the last prayer-meeting it was my scent-bottle! Oh, *by mistake*, of course; but still—" And she broke off significantly.

I was sitting opposite her in the carriage, (Mary had put us under her care for the afternoon,) and a glance passed between us. I have had the same sort of shock, occasionally, since. It has fallen to my lot to come away from a London festivity at a great London house, when something has (involuntarily) been left behind!

Of another kind of assemblage, permit one brief word. It is the present fashion to speak disparagingly of Queen Victoria's Drawing-Rooms, and to insist upon the improvement brought about by the late King.

How dreadful it must have been, that early start—that long wait in St. James' Park—that picnic luncheon in the carriage, with wine and sandwiches spilling and crumbling over the fine dresses—above all, with the pitiless glare of the noontide sun pouring down upon old, wrinkled faces and withered necks!

That is one side of the question.

The other is: are youth and beauty ever seen to greater advantage than in the fresh morning air? Can superb and costly plumage possibly have the same effect by night as by day? Do not the very bouquets droop and fade in the gas-laden atmosphere? And if venerable relations object to being exhibited *en grande tenue* at midday, surely if they saw themselves at midnight, weary with the day's round, laden with toilette additions, and tortured by aches and pains which systematically choose late hours for the attack, they would hesitate before giving their vote for the new régime. Let them but obtain the Royal permission to garb themselves as becomes their age, and they would look better, infinitely better, at noon than at night.

And the crowd without, how it did enjoy itself in the old time! Here was a sight, free to all, and appreciated by all.

Not very many years ago, it chanced that I met in New York five or six of its leading literary men, and one of them put a few casual questions about Drawing-Rooms at Buckingham Palace. My response evoked a passion of interest for which I was little prepared, and which I cannot think of to this day without a smile.

They drew closer and closer; they looked at one another; they commented, ejaculated, laughed at themselves, but owned with the most delightful simplicity that the subject was one of real and absorbing interest. They longed, and had longed all their lives, to know about Queen Victoria's Drawing-Rooms!

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It was not only crowds of humble spectators who flocked around the carriages in the Mall, as they stood there in line on those occasions.

The young princes themselves, who were shortly to appear by the side of their august mother, would slip in and out, strolling up and down, and chatting with those they knew.

One, (I suppose I ought not to say which?) peered into our carriage on the day I was presented, but as it obviously did not contain the party he sought, he hastily retired. We wondered whom he was looking for?

Just before the great gates of the Palace were opened, he and his brother had to be off to dress,—but the moving throngs remained, and were still there when we emerged from the ordeal several hours later, piped out by the exultant strains of the Highlanders in the Yard—still eager, still admiring, still enjoying themselves.

It does seem a shame that those poor folks should be defrauded of their spectacle by the new order of things!

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It will be seen that I am endeavouring to the best of my ability to disentangle the lesser threads of the web whose texture in the past differs from that of the present, as regards some aspects of London life.

This is no easy task, since they are so slim, so subtle, and seem so little worthy of mention.

Yet withal they are *there*; however elusive to casual observation, they are there;—and let us not forget that "Trifles make the sum of human things."

When I see and hear new sights and sounds on every side, and yet through it all mark how the same old tide ebbs and flows in a way the same as ever—how there is change, and yet no change, even on the surface of things—I am led to believe that even trivial and wholly insignificant distinctions have a value of their own.

The hours, habits, and sentiments of past generations are of little account in themselves, and all who will can be familiar with them through the pens of historians and novelists,—but to such of us as look back upon *personal experience* of the same, it seems curious that they should excite the risibility, not to say contempt of our sons and daughters.

It is natural perhaps that girls who dash about in taxies, alone and unattended, who form their own parties and think scorn of chaperonage, should smile at the restrictions and conventions of the sixties,—but do they really get more out of life than we did?

Bear in mind that I am not referring to the period when to be fragile and sentimental was the supreme object of "The fair," but to an epoch when healthier conditions of mind and body had set in. I say we had good time. I maintain that we disported ourselves gaily, and took our deprivations philosophically. And if you, my dear, young, feminine readers, imagine that we looked queer and hideous in our "Spoon" bonnets, and beflounced skirts, I may just hint, What should *we* have thought of *you*?

Of some of you at least; of such as pull a clown's cap about your ears, and waddle along in clown's—no, I will not pursue this further. There were, of course, comical figures then as now—and pretty faces that could not be content with their own prettiness, but must needs dab on adjuncts that have existed for women in all ages—and fashions that fashionables themselves professed to deplore—but I hold to it that we were not *more* foolish and certainly not *less* charming forty or fifty years ago than you dear young creatures are now.

Our "beaux" hung about us, attended upon us, pursued us then, just as yours do to-day. If we were prohibited certain diversions and partook of others less alluring to the masculine taste, they cheerfully assumed that what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander, and were not to be defrauded of our company.

Smart young guardsmen and hussars had ways of their own, and in effect whispered "Is your mother *always* with you, lovely Mary Anne?"

It was so—I give you my word, it was so. But you do not half believe it, and old-fashioned yarns are only boring.

Rest assured, then, that if I am allowed to prose on at random for a little while—if you will kindly let me lift a corner of the curtain, and mark the feet behind it dancing to the old, old tune, the feet shall be those of personages not wholly unimportant, not altogether forgotten, not even now entirely devoid of interest to the thoughtful and reflective.

Shall I dare to say, There were giants in those days? Ah, do not sneer,—perhaps, just perhaps, there were.

CHAPTER II.

My first London dinner-party—The giants at play among themselves—Mr. Reginald Palgrave on "The Fairchild Family"—Mr. Tennyson at the Royal Academy—The author of "The Schönberg-Cotta family" recalls her experiences of the Laureate—Persistent admirers invade his sanctuary at Farringford—"The Chops of the Channel!"—A French barrister misunderstands about *'eating* a chemical solution—Mr. Browning avouches himself ready to let lodgings—And put up a board on his house.

LATE one afternoon, shortly after our arrival on the scene, my sister and I were placidly disrobing in our room, when Mary whirled in, with a note in her hand. "Which of you will go with me to the dinner-party to-night?" cried she. "This is to ask me to bring one, as a lady has failed at the last moment."

We looked at each other. Which?

None of my elder sisters cared for that form of entertainment, while I loved it. Moreover, the dinners Mary went to were different from those to which we were accustomed, formal affairs of the ordinary cock-and-hen type, with perhaps a daughter thrown in—and even those were better than nothing to a girl who would fly into any open door,—so I did hope I should be the one.

I fancied too that Mary looked at me. She knew all about us two, and guessed how it would be. In another minute Ross was bringing out my best frock.

"I daresay we shall have a pleasant evening," said Mary, as we drove off. "It is always pleasant at the Lehmanns'. You must keep your eyes and ears open, for there is no knowing who will be there. Ah," continued she, as we reached the house, "that's nice. There is Mr. Robert Browning just in front of us. You know who he is? The poet, and the husband of the poetess, Mrs. Barrett Browning. I hope I shall sit next him, but it isn't likely."

She did, however, and a Mr. John Forster took her in. She said afterwards he was a delightful companion, and told her about his new book, "The Life of Sir John Eliot," which, oddly enough, we had ordered at Mudie's that very afternoon.

He proceeded to talk about portrait-painting, and said with a laughing look at a man on my side of the table, "I am sure that none but a gentleman can paint a gentleman, for insensibly the artist puts his own individuality and something of his own expression into every picture."

"What do you say to that, Mr. Millais?" inquired my next neighbour.

"Mr. Millais?" I pricked up my ears, and had a good look at Mr. Millais.

Previously I had been wondering who the handsome, ruddy-cheeked, bright-eyed, youngish man who took in our hostess, could be?—and now everyone was looking at him, and laughing. He was not, however, to be "drawn", and affecting deafness, pursued his own conversation, while Mr. Browning took it upon himself to reply in the other's stead.

"All nonsense, my dear Forster—nonsense, I assure you. For instance, if I were to set about painting Mrs. Proctor—" and then we all turned our heads, and looked at Mrs. Proctor, who is a very particular friend of the poet's, (as Mary informed me afterwards),—"if I were painting her," said he, "should I make her like me?"

Of course there was a general smile, but Mrs. Proctor was equal to the occasion. "Dear Mr. Browning," said she, sweetly, "if only you *could* make me like yourself, how happy I should be!" On which a distinct giggle—yes, a distinct giggle succeeded the smile.

Presently Mrs. Proctor again attracted attention, the talk having wandered round from artists to authors. "I am mentioned in one of the 'Roundabout Papers'," observed she, "and Mr. Thackeray speaks of me as 'The greatest novel-reader of the age.' He declares, too, that he wrote to ask me what to do with one of his characters, and inserts my answer."

At this it seemed to me that there were several doubtful faces, and Mr. Lehmann put the general feeling into words, when he said drily: "A man must indeed be hard up to know what to do with his heroes, before he asks advice of other people." Mrs. Proctor, however, took the snub in such good part, that it was hardly felt she had received one.

I now turned my attention to Mr. Millais, who was telling something interesting, and his clear tones easily carried it down the table.

He had begun about a certain Mr. Gibson, (when "Gibson, the Sculptor," whispered my neighbour in my ear, and I nodded gratefully,) "Gibson has written to the President of the Royal Academy," proceeded Mr. Millais, addressing the company generally, "saying that he intends leaving all his savings, amounting to about forty thousand pounds, to the Academy!"

Here he stopped for applause—at least I suppose he did—but instead there seemed to be some incredulity not to say merriment over the idea, and several jokes were made.

One sceptic inquired if Sir Charles Eastlake would in consequence take any steps to hasten the generous donor's demise? Another wondered if the sculptor would not change his mind after his prospective gift had been received with gratitude and there was no more to be said about it? And another shook his head, and hinted that even if the Council of the Academy got the money, it would probably be muddled away with nothing to show for it, as "such a thing *had* happened before."

I thought Mr. Millais took all this chaff very good-humouredly; and indeed at this party no one appeared to mind chaff. They all seemed to know each other so intimately, and to be on such thoroughly good terms, that no offence was given or taken.

Mrs. Proctor was a tremendous talker. She had a clever remark or reply for every topic that was started, and was listened to the moment she opened her lips. She was mostly for the men; but before they came up from the dining-room, she bestowed a few minutes on me, inquiring how I employed my time?

I said I still had masters, and worked at different studies. She said, abstractedly, "Ah, yes." Then suddenly burst forth with vivacity, "A very old lady once said to me, 'I have one regret on looking back over my long life, it is that I have not learnt more.'" This Mrs. Proctor seemed to think strange, and added with complacency, "*I* replied, that I have also one regret, namely, that I have not enjoyed myself more." She evidently thought much of her retort, but it seemed to me, to own the truth, a very poor one. However, it was not my place to say anything.

Just before we came away, I discovered that one of the men who had teased Mr. Millais about the Academy legacy was Mr. Chorley, the musical critic and composer. Perhaps there were some other flowers born to blush unseen in the assemblage, but if so, they must remain blushing, for I heard no more names that left their impress.

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As I had enjoyed this evening so much, Mary took me with her soon again, and a Mr. Reginald Palgrave was introduced to me as my left-hand dinner neighbour. He had a big, florid dowager on his other side, with whom he did not seem to have much in common, and as I was humbly thirsting for his notice, he by-and-by bestowed it on me.

He asked if I had been brought up on the "Fairchild Family"?—and on my eagerly assenting, declared he could still repeat some of the beginnings of the chapters. "But not the ends," rejoined I, slily,—and the pith of that observation lay in this, that the end of every chapter in that immortal work is a prayer, and did we not one and all skip that prayer?

This union of tastes however cemented our friendship rapidly, and we ran over the various points of the Fairchild children, their marvellous docility beneath parental supervision, and extraordinary naughtiness when exempt from it. Mr. Palgrave liked best the tale of Emily and the "Damescenes"; I preferred that of Miss Augusta Noble and her fearful end. We were agreed upon Betty's stockings and the beer,—and the thought of Louisa's fine friend, Mr. Tollemache, skating into the room on his first visit to the assembled family, was an exquisite delight to us both.

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By that light, I imagined my new friend to be quite a young man, so that when he said presently something about remembering the opening of the Royal Exchange, I really started. Could he be in earnest?

He was smiling broadly, and looked so boyish and merry that I thought he must be in fun, and doing my best to meet that fun half-way, I essayed, "And I, too, remember a famous opening, that of the British Museum."

For a moment Mr. Palgrave looked bewildered, and with dismay I realised that he had not meant to jest at all. He assured me—and he did not look displeased; human nature is human nature all the world over—that he was speaking the simple truth about himself; and next day, when we met him by chance in the broad noonday, I was able to believe it.

He still looked young, but not *that* young, as they say in Scotland—and I found that his age was forty or thereabouts; also that he was married, more's the pity. The nice men one meets accidentally seem always to be married,—if I were a girl of the period, I should say "Blow them!"

Mr. Palgrave, however, again made himself agreeable, and we were hoping he would go round the rooms with us—(did I say this encounter took place at the Academy?)—when he suddenly announced to Mary, "I wish I could stay with your pleasant party, but Mr. Tennyson—" glancing over his shoulder, "does not like to be left,—" and he hurried away.

Mr. Tennyson took his arm, and the two then proceeded on a tour of inspection,—but as we did not like to look too much at them, I had but a meagre opportunity of seeing what the Poet Laureate was like on that occasion.

Mrs. Charles, the author of "The Schönberg-Cotta Family," told us a good deal about him the next afternoon however,—when we went to spend it with her at Hampstead.

She said that about fifteen years before, while she was staying with an aunt near Plymouth, her father drove over from that town, bringing the poet with him. Mr. Tennyson was in a most genial mood—("Which he is not always, you know!" she added in parenthesis)—and was so gentle and benign that she, albeit then a young girl, ventured to show him a poem she had written and called "The Gentian."

Whether he really admired it or not, she could not tell; but he was certainly kind and encouraging, and confided to her that he had just finished a long poem himself, which was shortly to be published. He did not give its name, but by putting two and two together, she could subsequently have no doubt that this poem was "In Memoriam," which appeared six months afterwards.

The visitors were invited to remain for the night, but on Mr. Tennyson's stipulating that if he did, he should be allowed to smoke in his bedroom, the old lady bristled up. *That* she could not allow. Bedroom smoking was not only objectionable, but dangerous ; and for no one would she relax her prohibition rule. Mr. Tennyson proving equally obdurate, the hostess' own carriage was ordered out, and he was sent in it back to his hotel at Plymouth, whence, however, he returned the next morning to breakfast.

He was obviously amused at the whole incident ; possibly on the whole he preferred the freedom and comfort of a nice old-fashioned inn to the restraints imposed by a visit —especially to a rigid old martinet who might have had other prejudices as well as that against tobacco—and he proceeded to make merry with the young people, attacking them with all sorts of absurd questions, "Am I like what you expected?" "What *did* you expect a poet to be like?" etc., etc.

As they "played up" in return, the time passed all too quickly, and was often thought of afterwards, especially as their poet-friend was never met again by the Charles family until a year or two before we heard the tale.

This last meeting took place at Freshwater, where Mrs. Charles was staying with her husband ; on which occasion they went and called on the Tennysons at Farringford, and had some delightful hours with them. "He himself took us into every hole and corner of the house and garden," narrated our friend, "and we felt we were not intruders, since Mrs. Tennyson had set our minds at ease directly we appeared, by exclaiming, 'How very nice this is, and how curious! For it was only this morning that my husband was reading aloud some of his old journals, and came upon the story of his visit to you down in the West, and his being turned out of the house by your aunt to smoke elsewhere! He told us a great deal about you all, and was wishing he could meet you again.'"

As the genial, lovable Mrs. Charles thus spoke with an artless frankness that entirely charmed us, we did not wonder that even the recluse who rigidly chose to hedge himself in from observation, wished to meet her again. Farringford was barricaded against the prying world, but stood open to all who knocked in friendship's name,—(as I, too, learned in after life,)—and here I may add that it was not without cause that a sharp distinction was drawn, as the following will show.

The poet on coming down one morning to breakfast, fancied the room darker than usual, and on glancing at the windows to discover why, saw that instead of the blinds being drawn, human blinds excluded the sunlight without. Two faces were pressed against the panes at each window, and remained calmly there, despite detection.

After a momentary pause, he went to the front door, and inquired what the visitors wanted?

An elderly American, of the pronounced type, lifted his hat, and replied for the rest, "Sir, one of our reasons for crossing the Atlantic was to see the poet, Tennyson, and we resolved to see him if we waited here all day."

"Well, now you have seen me," said he, half-amused, half-annoyed, "will you kindly go away?" Which they did, after a prolonged and exhaustive stare all round.

It was not only our American cousins who obtruded themselves on the notice of the Poet Laureate. Mary had an instance of this which she told Mrs. Charles, and which I listened to, and may jot down here.

She was attending a lecture at the Royal Institution, when the seat next her was taken by Mr. Tennyson, and intuitively she divined that he had chosen it because at that time he did not know her, and would not therefore be expected to talk. Accordingly she sat still as a mouse.

But not many minutes had elapsed before a lady rustled across the hall, and addressed her neighbour thus: "There is plenty of room where I am, Mr. Tennyson; do come and sit by me?"

"I am quite comfortable here, thank you," replied the poet, in accents that would have enlightened almost anybody as to his inclinations. "I have come to listen to the lecture, and see the experiments—not to talk:—" and his tone was final, very final indeed.

Some people, however, are as obtuse as they are pertinacious. His interlocutor was not to be put off.

"Oh, this is not a good seat, not at all a good seat," persisted she. "Indeed, it is not; either for hearing or seeing. You will be much better off where I am,—" and her tones were so urgent, and her attitude so determined that, fearful of attracting general attention, the poor man had no choice but to rise. Already many eyes were upon him.

Triumphantly his captor then led the way; but Mary averred that in the long run her boldness gained her nothing, for not one word could she extract from her victim, who remained obstinately mute, and the very moment the lecture was over, seized his hat and bolted from the hall.

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To this recital Mrs. Charles listened with sympathetic approval. "I cannot imagine how women can be such idiots," cried she, and as she spoke her rather prominent blue eyes lit up with merriment.

What a vivacious, sparkling countenance she had! To own the truth, much as I loved the "Schönberg-Cotta Family" for Sunday reading,—it was, indeed, a favourite "Sunday book,"—my conception of its author had not previously inspired any vehement desire for her acquaintance. I fancied I knew the class of religious woman to which she belonged, and had, may I dare say it? enough of them without adding even a shining light to the list.

But the very first glimpse of "Bessie Charles," as she was called by Mary, dispelled the idea.

"Bessie" was perched on the top-rung of a ladder placed against her garden-wall, cutting and snipping,—(she could not have been *pruning*, for it was not the pruning season, but she may have been culling the high roses)—anyhow, she was up at the top, and we were down at the bottom—and she shouted to us, and laughed at us, and waved her scissors, and begged us not to look as she descended holding her petticoats together—all in such a bright, merry way that our hearts, my sister's and mine, were fairly taken by storm.

And we had, as may be imagined, a delightful afternoon.

Tea was set out under the trees, and Mr. Charles, who appeared presently, took us to a point whence was obtainable a far-stretching view of London fading away into the south, while in the summer haze the great dome of St. Paul's rose up like a huge balloon.

We thought our host an agreeable man, and he joined cordially in the general conversation, though seeming to listen for it to be led by his wife.

She started every fresh topic, and had an enthusiastic way of bursting out with good things that I wish I could reproduce, but cannot. It was simply as if they were bubbling up within and could not be kept down.

Talk turned upon divers results proceeding from the dropping of H's, an infirmity of speech to be occasionally met with then, as now.

"I must tell you my story, my very latest story about that," cried Mrs. Charles, and she proceeded to tell us as follows. "Baron Channel, one of our judges, you know, was trying a case not long ago," she said, "and, tell it not in Gath, dropped his H's perpetually. He does not always do so, but either he was tired, or he was worried, and he did then. The trial was about a ship called the 'Hannah'; and when he came to sum up, the learned Channel persistently called it the 'Anna.'"

On this, somebody whispered to Mr. Hawkins, the counsel on one side, "I thought the name of the ship was the 'Hannah.'"

"So it was"; quick as lightning came back the witty response; "so it certainly was,—but the fact is, she lost her 'H's' in the Chops of the Channel!"

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When we had done applauding this, someone else had a fresh anecdote of an H'less man, but would not in this instance give his name.

"I *had* to say it was Baron Channel," interposed Mrs. Charles, apologetically, "for without the name my story had no point. And, besides, what is a little thing like that? Who thinks the worse of anyone for that?—However, do let us have your anecdote,—" she caught herself up, as though her tongue were running away with her, and the narrator picked up his thread, and proceeded.

"My tale is of a lawyer, too," he said. "He was counsel in a lawsuit about a famous dye, and had to examine a foreign chemist through an interpreter, his questions being translated sentence by sentence as the examination went on.

"A good deal of information had been extracted, and all was going favourably, when the learned Q.C., forging ahead as he thought he saw daylight through the mists of an intricate case, cried, 'Well, after you had put the solution into a pan, did you *'eat* it?'"

"Eh puis, on le mange?" rendered the interpreter, in all good faith.

"On le mange? Mais, *quel horreur*!" ejaculated the Frenchman, throwing up his hands.

Not till the learned counsel had elaborately explained that he meant "*heat* it" not "*eat* it," could his equanimity be restored.

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Some friends of "Bessie's" now joined us, and were full of an amusing ghostly experience recently undergone by some of their own family, who had wintered in Florence.

They had a house there, an old rambling place, with gorgeous but worn and faded satin furniture. It looked like a house with a history, they thought, on taking possession of it,—and this fancy was speedily to be the general impression, for a night or two afterwards the ghosts began to play their various parts.

There was a rumbling and scampering up and down the old staircase, and in the morning several pieces of furniture were found to have been moved from their places in the principal drawing-room.

This looked ominous, but nothing more happened for a few nights, when the same commotion recurred; and as the family had previously agreed upon their line of action in case it did, with one accord they rushed from their bedrooms.

Sure enough, some heavy tables and chairs were piled up in the centre of the above-mentioned drawing-room, and something moved behind—some rather awful-looking thing, in the moonlight.

Not being timid folks however, they made a dart for the retreating figure, but before reaching it, it vanished—vanished apparently into the wall! The figure was that of a veiled nun, and one and all distinctly saw it.

What was to be done?

Well, they suspected a trick, and their coolness and sagacity met with its due reward.

They went off to bed, and delayed further investigations till the next morning, when feeling about with a stick, one of the boys unwittingly touched a secret spring, and behold! a door flew open! Behind the door was a grating, and behind the grating, a curtain—which was, however, too far back to be touched. Beyond a doubt, this was the solution of the mystery.

"What did they do?" we demanded in a breath.

"Gave information to the authorities, but the conspirators had cleared out"; replied our informants; "the supposed nun must have seen that the game was up, and had no doubt made off at once. It turned out that a homeless family of vagrants had found out the secret passage, and made themselves at home in uncommonly comfortable quarters before we took the house, when they hit on this clumsy plan to frighten us away. And with *some* people I suppose it might have succeeded, but not with *us*," she wound up, with ineffable complacency, which I must confess, I, for one, thought was justified.

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Florence would appear to be the right sort of place for poor people to live in. Mrs. Charles told us how she was talking one day about this to Mr. Browning, who of course knows the old Italian city in and out.

He said, "It is quite a common thing for people of good status, if they can't afford a whole house, to take in lodgers."

"Now," continued he, "in England, people would hesitate before doing that, and anyway they would find an excuse other than the real one, if they yielded to necessity. It is a curious circumstance," continued he, with a meditative smile, "that people who don't mind owning to being poor, never like to own that they let lodgings. It is always 'A gentleman suddenly finds his house too large for his requirements,' or 'A lady afflicted with heart disease cannot go upstairs, and has consequently no use for her upper rooms.' Now, if I were in straits, I should stick a bill outside my front door, with these words in large capitals, 'I LET LODGINGS.'" "But," observed Mrs. Charles, telling the tale, "I very much doubt if he would do anything of the kind if it came to the point."

CHAPTER III.

A young Mr. Leighton—A poem by a sculptor—The "Broken Thread of Life" on a marble tombstone mended by a clever custodian—A swallow is "a vast deal more like a parrot"—Mr. George Macdonald's lectures—A figure stealing along the wall—Mr. Ruskin argues a point behind a curtain—A tree that may have been planted by Noah—"As the house was built in the reign of William the Third!"

As Mary was fond of pictures, she often went to the Academy, as did we, though I cannot say I found in it the charm she did. I felt too much like the pale young man whom I overheard remark to his wife—she must have been his wife—as he sank wearily on to a seat: "It's this confounded bad air that makes my back ache!" The air, or something else, at Burlington House, always did make my back ache. However, I went.

In 1865, when we were again in London, under the same kindly roof as before, there were some splendid pictures on view by a Mr. Leighton, a young painter about five and thirty—and these were being much talked about. The one generally considered the best was that of King David gazing from a terrace at "The mountains round about Jerusalem." Against the blue sky was a dove with outspread wings, and the gentle sadness on the monarch's brow said as plainly as words, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away, and be at rest!"

This picture was very beautiful, and a little crowd was usually to be found studying it.

Another was called "Helen," and we were grouped in front of "Helen" one day, when up came Mr. Lehmann, and told us an anecdote *à propos.* He was inspecting it before it left Leighton's studio, and observed, "You have got a good effect of moonlight there."

"Moonlight, you Goth?" retorted his friend, somewhat nettled. "*Moonlight*, did you say? It is not *moonlight*, it is brilliant *sunlight*."

"To soothe his ruffled feelings," continued our informant, "I made haste to reply, 'Why, to be sure! No doubt. Now that I look closer, it *is* sunlight. Yes, yes, it *is* sunlight,—' and as Leighton still looked perturbed, and continued to explain and point out, I murmured at intervals, 'Of course, of course. Sunlight, of course:'—but between ourselves, you know," continued Mr. Lehmann, shaking his head and laughing, "I never yet saw sunlight have that peculiar effect on any figure."

Mr. Woolner, the sculptor, then drew near us, and we were interested in meeting him, although he had nothing particular to say. We had, however, read his poem, "My beautiful lady," and rather, but not altogether, admired it. It had been passed on by us to a friend, and came back with this criticism: "Some of the passages in Mr. Woolner's poem are very beautiful, but there is a certain unreality about his sorrow for the 'Beautiful Lady's' death, which makes me doubt if such a mourner has ever known real sorrow."

What a wonderful gift is penetration! The unreality thus detected proved to be justified by the fact that the fair one in question who was drawn from life, had not died at all, but married and gone to the Colonies! At least, so said a relation of the poet-sculptor, who may have been supposed to know.

After talking a little, Mr. Woolner introduced another of his craft lingering near, and rather obviously waiting for him to have done with us, and go off with him.

This was Mr. Westmacott; and although Mr. Westmacott did not on the present occasion favour us by making much of a stay in our vicinity, he came to call not long afterwards, and told us such a funny story that we loved him at once for it.

He had been in Scotland the previous autumn, and came across a curious monument erected to a great lady.

It consisted of three Fates disposed at intervals upon an inclined plane. One of these held in one hand a pair of shears, and in the other the Woof of Life. The thread attached to the other was held by a cherub below. The idea was, of course, that the Fate above had cut the Thread of Life.

But here came in the droll part of the affair, for the Thread was not cut at all!

"I could not make it out," said Mr. Westmacott, "so I peered into the monument more closely, and found that an inch or two of the marble thread was not marble at all, but white string! Common white string—which at a distance was indistinguishable from the original!

"While I was wondering, up came the man in charge, a regular 'buddy' of the Andrew Fairservice type, and putting his hands on his hips, observed with much sly exultation, 'Wasna' yon a fine idee o' ma ain, sir? I seed that pairt o' the marble was gane, so I matched it wi' a bit string—juist string—an' tho' it's mysel' that says it, I doot if onybody noo wad ever ken that the "Threed o' Life" had been broken.'"

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But let me for a moment go back to the galleries of the Academy, for while there we heard a good thing about another ignoramus, though he was not one who meddled with art, but only protested against it.

This was an old country squire, not over-intelligent even as country squires go, but still unwilling to be thought out of the swim. Accordingly he now and again, at lengthy intervals, plodded up to Town, and struggled with might and main to do as others did.

Such simple souls always go to the Academy. They don't like it; they don't know anything about it; they are thankful when they have got rid of it from their programme,—but they would feel it a blight on their pretensions to fashion if they went back to their woods and fields without being able to talk about it.

Accordingly our friend went, and as he had been dining out the night before, and had been told by his hostess (to whom he had confided his intentions of seeing the pictures next day) that he must on no account miss one much admired, of a lady watching a swallow, by Mr. Millais, he looked up the number in his catalogue.

But here was a shock! It chanced that the worthy squire knew about birds, was indeed something of an authority upon birds and bird-life, and to tell him that thing was a swallow! He literally choked with disgust, and finally burst forth: "*That* a swallow? Tell me I don't know a swallow when I see it? The fool that painted that could never have seen a swallow in his life! *That*? Humph! It's a vast deal more like a *parrot*!"

And it was more like, for a parrot it was. The angry gentleman had mistaken the number of the picture, and pulled up in front of Mr. Val Princep's portrait of a woman with a large parrot stretching out its wings in the foreground.

Over his vexation and mortification, when he learned the truth, a veil had better be drawn, for I believe he had an impression that the joke told against himself, and your simple squire is very sensitive to such jokes.

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We all know that there are things which we are supposed to enjoy, which it is taken for granted that we must enjoy, and which we do not really enjoy at all.

Human nature is perverse; and while in some characters the component parts fit as neatly as the pieces in a dissecting map, in others there are odd bits. An odd bit in my own is an antipathy to lectures.

Not the lectures we all receive in youth, when we are being (excuse me) licked into shape by our elders—but those, which, grown older and wiser, we are supposed of ourselves to court for our own advantage.

The very sight of a platform, and table, and tumbler of water makes me sullen. However, propriety forbidding any other outward demonstration of the rebellious spirit within, I assume an attitude of profound attention—the sort of attitude Royalty adopts, and of which the late King Edward was a past-master—and in a poor, feeble sort of way, try for his inimitable bend of the neck. But I cannot attain to it, and presently it melts into a droop neither polite to the lecturer nor convincing to the audience.

More and more stiff and rigid grows my weary frame as the minutes pass—every minute an hour long—and though I neither yawn nor fidget, that is merely because I have been trained in youth to "behave" as nurses say, and even to suppress the scream of delight I would fain add to the clapping of hands when the monotonous voice ceases at last.

This much being confessed, it will be seen that when Mr. George Macdonald, whose delightful books I knew by heart, announced a series of lectures on Shakespeare, to be delivered weekly at his house in Harley Street, I was in two minds about going.

But I did like "Alec Forbes," and loved the "Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood,"—and the thought of them won the day.

Mr. Macdonald had taken the house for the season, no doubt with these lectures in view, as it was just right for anything of the kind. It belonged to Mr. Luce, an artist; and the studio, a large and lofty room built out behind, was cool and light, and could hold a considerable number of people.

We entered from the hall, descending by a sort of Jacob's Ladder—and there was a loose mat at the top, over which several old ladies tripped. However they all got down in safety, and if they came to grief after the ascent, there were plenty of hands all round, and the floor was a safe place to fall upon.

At first I thought that there were only going to be women present, but presently a very, very old man shambled in, and was led to the front, when Mary whispered to me, "Mr. Crabbe Robinson. A great authority on Shakespeare in his young days, but now his memory is going."

Despite that drawback, we heard afterwards that Mr. Macdonald had consulted Mr. Robinson frequently as to the rendering of certain passages; and at the close of the lecture I went to—(I only went to one, for reasons before mentioned)—he came down from his little dais, and the two talked eagerly together.

Before this however another male visitor had appeared, whose entrance caused a fluttering of the dovecotes. But perhaps I should here admit that a tolerable sprinkling of manly heads was visible before the lecture began, though who these belonged to did not concern us. What *did* was that Mr. Ruskin was slowly stealing along the wall looking for a quiet corner.

And as luck would have it, one found favour in his eyes well within our line of vision, and we studied the "Master" at our leisure.

At least, *I* did, and blessed my stars that had sent me to that quiet room, when I had been within an ace of seeking gayer haunts.

I can see before me now that impressive countenance with its rugged outline and shaggy brows. I can see the sunlight fall upon the tangle of russet hair, and the flash of the deepset eyes when ever and anon something was said that pleased, or roused, their owner.

During an interval, grateful to everybody on a June day, we all stood about talking to acquaintances, and suddenly I found myself close to Mr. Macdonald, who had hopped off his perch, if one may speak thus irreverently, and was down among the ruck.

He was talking and arguing a point with someone unseen, and tapped his notes several times with his forefinger; also he seemed to listen eagerly to his friend's replies.

In another minute I perceived that this friend was Mr. Ruskin, who had left his seat and advanced to a window-nook, where the two were having a lively time. Enough of their argument reached my ears to show that on two or three Shakespearian points they were at variance.

That the mighty Ruskin was not infallible, nor even always reasonable, is of course known to all,—but had he at that time written an extraordinary little admonition to us of the other sex, that came under my notice in after years, I almost think I should have dared to beard him on the subject. It is, I think, in "Fors Clavigera," that he denounces our foolish extravagance in dress, (well and good, that,) but our Mentor takes a plunge in his next exordium which reveals him so hopelessly out of his depth that no woman can read it without laughing. We are exhorted, in effect, not to waste our money on useless frillings and fripperies, but to place our reliance on excellence of cut and fit, which the simplest garb will show off the best; "and this," the learned Mr. Ruskin assures us, "can be obtained from *any village dressmaker*."

Any village dressmaker? I confess that when this amazing statement met my eye—ah well, to the author of "The Stones of Venice" much may be forgiven.

Later on that afternoon Mr. Ruskin and Mr. Macdonald met more peaceably. They joined our party, and something or other was said about church architecture, which drew from the latter the following opinion. He owned to having been disappointed in Cologne Cathedral on first beholding it; it appeared to him to be graceful and elegant, but not solemn—and to this the former agreed.

"I can well believe you," said Mr. Ruskin, "for though Cologne Cathedral follows correctly all the rules of architecture, there is no imagination about it."

They then discussed landscape paintings, and on this head Mr. Macdonald had much to say. He contended that, as a rule, they represented only a particular portion of Nature, but that a true artist would insensibly weave into his picture something of the mood he himself was in while painting it, and that this mood would communicate itself to those looking upon the picture afterwards.

The "True artist"? I was wandering about the beautiful hill-sides of Bordighera long after the speaker had ceased to wander there or anywhere on earth, and noting the artists literally as the sands of the sea in that lovely spot where for years he dwelt and reigned, (and where a tablet marks the house he lived in), I wondered how many of them communicated their moods to their little pink and blue and yellow sketches? In Bordighera every second person carries an easel and colour-box; it is really a distinction to be without one.

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To return to our art lecture. Before we left Harley Street, a Colonel Collyer had a chat with us. He told us that some old Dutch pictures had lately been left him, and as they looked somewhat dim and blurred, he thought they would be the better for a fresh coat of varnish.

Accordingly he took them to a picture-dealer, who examined each closely, returning to one again and again. Finally he observed, "There are several coats of paint on this picture."

"Then would you remove one, at any rate?" said the colonel. The obliging dealer at once proceeded to clear away an ivy-covered ruin with a background of trees, whereupon appeared a cloudy sky, (it had been bright and sunny before,) and in place of the ruin, a pair of figures standing in an alcove.

"I believe there is still a fresh picture beneath this," said the dealer.

"Look and see!" said the colonel.

Sure enough, the busy fingers of the dealer speedily disclosed something altogether new and different, in fine, a really valuable Dutch painting, but my memory does not tell me of what. Colonel Collyer lived in the country, or no doubt he would have shown it us.

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He told us, however, a funny little anecdote, before he left. He was going round the garden of his house before he bought it, accompanied by the caretaker and her little son, when the boy pointed to a tree saying, "That tree is two hundred years old; the gardener told me so."

"Perhaps," said the colonel, essaying a mild joke, "it is even older, for it looks as if Noah might have planted it when he came out of the Ark."

The little fellow thought for a moment, then ran back to his mother who had dropped behind, and exclaimed excitedly, "Do you hear that, mother? The gentleman says that it was Noah who planted that tree."

"Like enough, my dear," rejoined she placidly, and turning to the colonel, added by way of confirmation, "It's very likely sir, isn't it? For you see, sir, this house was built in the reign of King William the Third."

"I bowed assent," said Colonel Collyer; "and doubtless she will pique herself on her knowledge of history to the end of her days."

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Society functions do not as a rule yield much fruit for talk and thought of a general nature. We have each our own point of view, and it is our own feelings and emotions, our own ups and downs, our own heart-burnings or ecstacies which, according as things go, can make a heaven or hell of any festive scene.

And some of us will acknowledge as much, and some will not. I have seen a youth with wan face and pallid lips inwardly cursing his folly which brought him to a spot where *She* is shining like a star, but not for him. With what sad eyes he watches—watches! How he starts when spoken to! And how impatiently he extricates himself from officious would-be friends, who seek to alleviate his gloom!

His rival is there, gay, happy, contented—all *his* world draped in sunbeams. *He* has a greeting, a laugh, a jest for everyone. *He* finds the hours so bitter, so full of weariness to the other, pass on flying feet. *He* would fain put back the clock of Time.

When Memory brings back that summer night to each in years to come, the one will sigh, the other smile,—and perhaps in each case it may have been the turning-point of a life.

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And again it is the sweet young girl who, gathering all the force of her nature, poor tender sapling, to conceal the misery of her disappointment, struggles for the careless cheerfulness appropriate to the occasion. She dares not for an instant relax her hold upon herself. She is only *too* eager, *too* responsive, to be natural. Beneath her vivacity one catches the false note, one suspects the strain.

All her prettiness, and smartness, and the toilette so carefully thought out, and the hair dressed in the style she fancies *he* approves—all is thrown away.

She hates the sight of herself in the glass. She hates everything about her.

And yet she cannot bear to go home, hoping against hope that something will yet happen to lift from her poor heart the weight that has settled there.

Perhaps in her case there is no other girl? Perhaps she has only been mistaken all along, and realises it at last? Ah, it matters little. The truth has reached her somehow, and she will never be blind again.

And the brazen notes of the band clash on, and the fluttering crowds pass by, and all the glare and din are only one long dream of pain, which no one ever hears of, but which even in remembrance sends a shudder through her veins.

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Such depths may not be reached, and yet in the routine of ordinary social life, no one can deny that there is scope for every variety of feeling, from supreme bliss to torturing discomfiture. We may be elated, or mortified, by events which are nothing to anybody but ourselves. We may be puffed up by a passing success—a mere trifle, not in reality worth a moment's self-congratulation—or let down by an accidental neglect, which vanity magnifies into an affront.

It was not intentional? That is still more cutting than if it had been. That shows us of how little account we are. A trifle unobserved by others will often rankle until it festers.

And if it be a breath of disparagement casually dropped and quickly forgotten, which is repeated by a mischief-maker, how it stings!

"So-and-so could not think what you had done to yourself last night. But *I* stood up for you," cries the so-called friend, affecting not to see her victim wince; and she will work in the pin until its prick becomes a sore.

Or perhaps it is, "Let me give you a hint. Don't go to Madame Chapeau for your *next* hat. Somehow she never does suit you—and we all think so, though only I have the courage to say it. I can't bear you to wear unbecoming hats." What more is needed to render the wearer of the hat safely despondent for the rest of the day?

Do you know many people at a party, and does the stranger under your wing know nobody? You could have a really good time if you had only yourself to think of; but wherever you turn, there is that silent figure at your elbow, trying to be pleased and interested, but finding it up-hill work. Well now, what will you do? Will you ignore obligations, and simply let him or her drift along in your wake, meaning by-and-by to put things right by some easy apology, such as, "I am afraid you must have been sadly bored," or "So sorry you had such a dull afternoon"?

If you are downright selfish—selfish to your heart's core, you will do this—but if at times you feel a twinge of compunction, you will look about for someone "suitable" who will take your poor hanger-on off your hands for a time,—and if you have a sweet and loving and beautiful nature, if you are one of those "With whom the melodies abide, of the everlasting chime," you will not need to think, you will not pause to consider, but will find in the stately function or the brilliant assemblage, just the same opportunity of shedding sunshine or softening shadow to those about you, as in any other of our earthly paths.

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These ramblings do not seem much to the point, do they? Not to any point, I think I hear my readers say,

—but what I am trying to make clear is that the reason for my dwelling solely on such aspects of my London life as would seem to infer I was forever meeting persons of distinction in art and literature, is that of gatherings where none of these were present, I have nothing to relate which can be related.

Of our own affairs we gossiped then, as girls gossip now. Be sure I did not regale the Alices and Kittys of my generation with what to them would have been the dull pratings of dull people, and equally be sure that I am not going to say now, what the Alices and Kittys and I talked about instead! You Ethels and Irenes can guess *that* without much ado,—and when you come across, as I hope some of you do, the great men and women of to-day whose names will figure in the pages of to-morrow, keep your memories of them for that time, and hope for a hearing. If you do not obtain one, well, there is no help for it.

CHAPTER IV.

We hear Spurgeon preach at the Tabernacle—The old Field-Marshal takes us to the vestry afterwards—Prince Alfred finds an acquaintance having his boots blacked in the Park—Mr. Charles Kingsley is slow of speech—A peculiar song by the author of "Tom Brown's Schooldays"—A Welsh jury find a verdict that displeases the judge—They put forward a curious reason for it—A rough diamond puts his own phraseology into the mouth of a chaste young widow—"How domned stout you be got!"

A GREAT Scotch Churchman came to luncheon with us one day, and as he was often at my father's house in Scotland, we knew what to expect when it was announced that Dr. Norman Macleod was in the drawing-room.

"Norman," as the Glasgow people fondly called him, had come to preach for a special occasion in a London church, and confided presently that he had "forgotten the bands for his pulpit gown," and must buy a pair somewhere.

"But the shops are all shut for Saturday afternoon," he was reminded, and he looked somewhat blank.

"I can lend you a pair that I believe would do," said Mr. Farrer Herschell, a barrister who was present. "The bands we wear in court are so like those that Scotch ministers wear in church, that no one would detect a difference, if there be a difference."

He then produced the bands, and Dr. Macleod looked at them and looked at him. There was a world of humour in his eye.

"Tell me," said he, slowly, "have these ever hung a man?"

"No," replied Mr. Herschell, "but they have transported a woman."

"All right," cried "Norman," grasping the bands, "*that's* all right; *that's* just what I want to do!"—and he went away with them in his pocket, and wore them I believe the next day.

But we did not go and hear our great preacher on that occasion, we had another goal in view.

It chanced that before we knew "Norman" was to be in Town, arrangements had been made for our party to occupy the box—no, the pew—belonging to the old Field-Marshal, Sir John Burgoyne, at Mr. Spurgeon's wonderful Tabernacle, the next evening,—and we were afire both to hear Spurgeon and to see the Tabernacle.

A question had arisen as to how we were to get there?

No horses were taken out of our host's stables on Sundays, and we rather hoped in our hearts for the Underground Railway? This had not been very long opened, so was still a novelty,—besides which, to be gadding about by train on a Sunday evening was in itself a fearful and wonderful joy to girls brought up as we had been.

Here, however, a new difficulty presented itself; the nearest Underground Station to the Tabernacle was some little distance from it.

Accordingly, what about hansoms? We were a party of four, and a couple of hansoms would take us. Eventually, our very strict host was won over to think that hansoms might be lawful under the circumstances, and as this was *his* ploy, originated by himself, perhaps he gave way a little sooner than he might otherwise have done. Off we set, and found the old Field-Marshal awaiting us in the porch of the Tabernacle.

A wonderful spectacle was the Tabernacle at that date. The fame of Spurgeon was at its height, and every corner was full. When the singing began, unlike anything else of the kind I have ever heard, the effect was extraordinarily fine.

And when the stout, little, homely-looking man began to pace up and down the platform which was his idea of a pulpit, and to throw out one ringing sentence after another, these gradually gaining in force and intensity as he warmed to his subject, the hush of rapt attention in so vast a congregation was striking in the extreme.

We youthful people had often heard Spurgeon's sermons read aloud in our Presbyterian home, and loved them for two reasons—they were good, and they were short. Also there were the "Spurgeon's Tit-bits," like plums in a pudding, to be looked for every now and again.

But while these last were few and far between on that memorable evening when for the first and last time we heard the famous preacher's own voice, the rest of the sermon, the real sermon, fulfilled our utmost expectations.

And recollect that we were accustomed to fine oratory, and had been early taught to appreciate it. We knew what it was to hearken to Caird, Macleod, and lesser lights, who were still "lights," and could hold the attention of that most critical of audiences, an assemblage of Scotchmen and Scotchwomen. So that it was not perhaps without cause that dear old Sir John turned on us from time to time a look of benignant approbation. I fancy he felt that his box—no, his pew—was not being wasted.

At the close of the service, he made a queer suggestion, but no doubt knew what he was doing. Would the young ladies like to shake hands with Mr. Spurgeon before they went?

Of course we should, and our elders agreed to wait for us below; so we followed our leader up the windings of a narrow staircase.

"Come in," said a voice, in answer to Sir John's tap at a small door,—and though possibly the wearied man reposing in his arm-chair, exhausted by the day's work, would have preferred being left in peace, he rose at once with a kind smile, and a cordial grasp of the hand for all.

Sir John explained who we were, and again he shook us warmly by the hand, and said something about the Colquhoun family and our "Well-known, godly grandmother," —but I forget what. The interview did not last above a few minutes, but through all the years that have come and gone, I see it now as plain as ever.

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As Dr. Norman Macleod was in London all that week, he came again to see us, and had an amusing little incident to relate of his walk across the Park.

"I thought I would not come into your fine house with dirty boots," said he, to Mary; "so, as the roads were muddy from last night's rain, I stopped a boy, and was having them brushed, when a hand was laid on my shoulder, and a voice said, 'What are you doing here, Dr. Macleod?'"

"Getting my boots cleaned, for they badly need it," said I, "and I can't turn my head to see who is speaking to me."

"On this I heard a sort of chuckle, and the speaker stepped round in front of me, and behold! it was Prince Alfred."

"Please don't take off your hat," said he, as I was making a shift to get hold of it, "for people will recognise me if you do;" ("Of all things, he hated attracting notice," observed "Norman," in parenthesis,) "so I just did as I was bid;—and then he went on to beg me to go back to luncheon with him, saying he was off on his trip round the world to-morrow, and did not know when he would be back. So I went, and had a very pleasant luncheon," concluded our friend; "and very glad I was too that I had a pair of clean boots on!"

When presently, Dr. Macleod himself started for a distant land—sent by the Church of Scotland to India to inspect the Mission Stations there—there was some little doubt raised as to whether at his age it were not too great a risk to his health?

He inquired of his aged mother what she thought?

The noble old lady replied without a moment's hesitation, "Go." She was over eighty at the time, and it seemed likely that she might not live to see him return,—but while this was evidently in her mind, she added with emphasis, "Yes, go, my dear son; and if I never see your face again, I am still willing to let you go."

She never did see his face again,—but it was he, not she, who was called from earth first, as we all know.

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I must, however, go back a little.

One day Mr. Charles Kingsley came in, and we had an opportunity of seeing if he were like his photograph, which had been sent Mary, or not? To own the truth, it flattered him, as he is so very red in the face, perhaps from leading an out-of-door life in all weathers. Otherwise, it was fairly good.

In ordinary conversation, Mr. Kingsley stammers a good deal, but, being conscious of it, he has taken pains to overcome the defect by speaking very slowly—almost too slowly—for when we heard him make a speech on one occasion, we felt inclined to goad him on, it became so tiresome.

Another day we had Mr. Hughes,—"Tom Brown Hughes,"—and my recollection of him is of a man neither tall nor short, neither stout nor thin, with fair hair, and blue eyes, and a round, pleasant face.

He came to dinner, and in the evening was asked to sing, as it was understood that he would do so if invited. Furthermore we had been told that he has a theory that a man can do anything he tries, if only he gives his mind to it.

All I can say is, that it is to be hoped that not many people will give their minds to singing, if the results are what they were in the case of this enterprising gentleman.

He sat down at once to the piano, nothing loth, though several musicians were present; and instantly began what he called a song, though it may be doubted if anyone present could, unaided, have discovered this. It did not even "Suggest an air," as did the performance of the renowned Macphairson Clonglocketty Angus M'Clan, in the Bab Ballads, though certainly "It was wild—it was fitful—as wild as the breeze."—"It wandered about into several keys;"—and although I allow that "It was jerky, spasmodic and harsh, I'm aware," I deny that it even "Suggested an air."

However, when this was over, we had again a charming and interesting companion in Mr. "Tom Brown Hughes," and could quite understand how he had written his immortal "School-days."

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Before he left, he told us a story of the Welsh Law Courts; and despite his being a Welshman, and the story's containing a hit at his own nationality, told it with delightful spirit and humour.

A prisoner pleaded "Guilty" to a charge during the Assizes, at one of the little towns in North Wales.

Quoth the judge to the jury in consequence; "You will find a verdict accordingly."

To his surprise, they did not do so on the spot, but through their foreman, requested leave to retire.

"Retire?" frowned his lordship, perplexed,—but of course he had to grant the required permission.

When after an interval of some minutes, the jury filed in again, they still more surprised the court. They returned a verdict of "Not Guilty."

"Not guilty? Nonsense!" The judge fidgetted in his seat. "Nonsense, nonsense! Go, and reconsider your verdict."

Out they filed again, but on returning there was the same result. They afresh pronounced the prisoner "Not Guilty." What on earth could be the meaning of it?

"Gentlemen, be so good as to explain this extraordinary conclusion," demanded the judge, inwardly fuming. "How is it possible that you can have arrived at it, when the prisoner himself pleaded 'Guilty'?"

"It is this way, my lord," replied the spokesman, "we know this man; he is a neighbour of ours; and he is such a damned liar, that nobody can believe a word he says."

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A damned liar? Now a strong expression may or may not be warranted by the occasion, (—and perhaps it is, as an old Scotch lady once averred, "a great set-aff to convairsation!")—but surely those who agree with her, should keep such phraseology for their personal use, and not foist it on to the lips of others?

Let me tell what once happened in defiance of this rule; —long, long ago, but happen it did,—and I think it still worth remembering.

A beautiful young widow, set apart as it were by her sorrow from the rough-and-tumble of everyday life, had in her nature a touch of the austere which added to the awe in which she was held by some.

Wandering one day in the grounds of her father's Wiltshire home, she encountered one of his farmer-tenants whom she had not seen for some years, and who meantime had expanded, as jolly farmers will.

Having rallied him a little on this in good-natured fashion, she passed on; and the next to accost old Bunny was his landlord, Sir John, who also took him to task, with a shake of his head.

"Putting on flesh too fast, Bunny!"

Bunny, with a grin, scratched his head, in no wise disconcerted. "Well now, Zur John, that be just what your darter said just now. Says she to me, says she, 'God bless my zoul, Bunny,' says she, 'how domned stout you be got!'"

Had the above reached me through any other medium than that of my admirably truthful and exquisitely maligned sister-in-law herself, I should have deemed it sacrilege to believe it.

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To return to Mr. Hughes, we had scarcely done laughing at his story of the Welsh jury when Mr. Farrer Herschell, who was present, and had thoroughly appreciated it, amused us by relating an absurd scene in a London law-court of which he himself had been a spectator that day.

A very nervous young girl of the dressmaking class was put into the witness-box, when she began to giggle from pure fright.

As she looked respectable and not one to need quelling, the barrister conducting the cross-examination tried to reassure her;—but as he did not appear to succeed, the judge spoke, and not so mildly. "Girl, be quiet. Don't be disrespectful to this court."

This did not however have the effect anticipated; and as the giggling only increased, his severity increased also.

But by this time she was alike incapable of answering and of stopping,—and an awful frown settled on the great man's brow. "Girl," he thundered, "are you laughing at *ME*?"

"Please sir,—yes, sir."

"She did not know what she was saying," appended

Mr. Herschell, "she was shaking from head to foot and a burst of tears was imminent,—but as for us, the old gentleman's discomfiture was so unexpected and complete that we simply one and all roared with laughter. He won't hear the end of it for many a day."

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We were a good deal in the law line that year at Mary's, and an ex-Lord Chancellor of Ireland, Sir Joseph Napier, often came to her house.

One day he came in laughing. "I had an amusing dinner-party at Lady Donegal's last night," said he, "and knowing you love amusing things, I saved up something for you that took place there."

He then told the tale. One of the guests was a man whom for political reasons it was desirable to conciliate, and Lady Donegal set herself to pay him attention.

Presently she desired him to notice some beautiful prints of Carlo Dolce's paintings,—when he was loud in admiration, and as he was going away, observed; "I think those prints most beautiful, but the oil-paintings they were taken from must be even finer. I wonder now if you would be so kind as to tell me where this Mr. Carlo Dolce lives, as I should like to call, and give him a commission to paint something of the kind for me?"

Wonderful is a woman's wit. Without changing a muscle of her face, Lady Donegal replied, "I really can't say where he is at this moment, but I can inquire."

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Most Londoners will agree that there is nothing so pleasant in London as to get out of London—and return soon. "Week-ends" had not come into fashion in the sixties, but we often ran down to the country for a few days, and came back laden with sweet June flowers and the songs of nightingales in our ears.

On one occasion we went to Reigate, that most lovely Surrey village as it then was,—and were taken by our hosts to see their neighbour, Miss Manning, known to the world by her old-fashioned books, "Mary Powell," "Cherry and Violet," etc., etc.

For a very unusual and wholly delightful style, those charming tales still seem to me unrivalled ; and in childhood I regretted, and I regret still, that their exquisite quality was not equalled by their quantity.

There are, I fancy, (but may be wrong ?) only five extant; namely, the two above-mentioned, "The Colloquies of Edward Osborne,"—"The Household of Sir Thomas More," and "The Old Chelsea Bun-House."

Printed and got up in a mode peculiar to themselves, they may yet be found upon a few book-shelves, carefully preserved as relics of days when they had a considerable vogue—but it may be doubted if even their names are known to the present generation.

And even at the time of which I write, Miss Manning's popularity as an authoress was waning.

She was a fragile old lady, living a very simple life in a country village ; and although continuing to receive substantial sums from her publishers, there was not much evidence of it in her surroundings.

Truth to tell, they did not exhibit much comfort, and certainly no luxury ;—and we were a little wondering at this within ourselves, when a chance remark changed the whole aspect of things. "No one knows how much that dear little woman gives away," observed a fellow-parishioner, whom we encountered as we left the house. "What we should do without her, I can't think. Her hand is in her pocket all the time."

We then talked of Miss Manning's "Story" ; the "Story" of her youth, which was no secret from the world,—but as the world of that date was not the world of to-day, I venture to think it may be new to some at least of my readers, so will recount it.

The gentle little old lady we had just beheld leading her peaceful, uneventful life in this quiet nook, had had her romance, a romance such as falls to the lot of few, thank God.

She had loved, and been loved in return—but the fateful words had not been spoken when the shadow of a coming separation loosed the tongue of a too self-distrustful man. He felt he *could* not go to far-away India, (how far away then, you young people living in happier days, can scarcely realise,) without at least laying bare his heart,—though with characteristic unselfishness, he desired to spare her the pain of writing if she could not let him dare to hope. If she sent *no* answer, he promised to take her silence not as giving *consent*, but *denial.*

Foolish, was it? Ah, how foolish, he was never to know—and she never to forget. To let a life's venture hang on such a thread!—To leave such a page unfinished!

But it is easy to be wise after the event, and it may well be that the very people who will cry out the loudest at the hyper-chivalry of this hapless lover, would have been the first to do as he did.

The letter reached her hands all right. *She* found no fault with it. We can believe with what joyous heart-throbbing she penned her reply, and despatched it within the hour. We can see the smile upon her lips as she watched her messenger's departing figure, and counted the hours which must elapse before another figure could fly to her side, borne thither on the wings of love and gratitude.

It was a pouring wet day; and as a brother was going out in the rain at any rate, and going moreover in the direction of the village post-office, to his care was entrusted this second all-important missive;—but strange as it must seem, the writer never once inquired afterwards if her behest had been fulfilled?

Perhaps she was shy? Perhaps not quite certain of family approval? The brother may have been unsympathetic, who can tell?

All that is known is that the next day wore on and on, and finally drew to its close, and—no one came.

How often must she have started and listened, thinking she caught a sound, a step, a voice—something, anything betokening the glad ending of her watch, we can picture to ourselves; how sadly the shades of night must have fallen, when hope could lift its head no longer.

But to be sure, with a new dawn must have arisen new life? He would come, and all be explained?

He never came.

And she never saw him again, for he sailed within the week; sailed without a word or sign.

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Some years afterwards she heard of his marriage, and of his remaining on in India, where he had an honourable and prosperous career.

And years passed, five-and-twenty of them, before the mystery was cleared up, when it came about in this wise.

The Manning family, who had been stationary all that time, moved into a new house; and in clearing out the lumber incidental to such upheavals, an old coat belonging to the brother who had presumably posted his sister's fateful letter, was dragged to the light.

The same sister turned out the pockets; and there—think of it, reader!—picture that moment, that pitiful moment!—*there it was*! Yellow and crumbled, but with the seal unbroken, the stamp untouched—there it was!

And the past was the past, and beyond recall. And why wound another's heart, and fill it with unavailing remorse and shame?

So the culprit was never told, and the lost lover was never told;—and it was said that a kind of comfort was taken in the knowledge that the latter had but fulfilled his promise, and acted like the high-minded gentleman he was;—yet methinks there must have come times when that rainy day, that happy day, that bright spot in the dim distance, must still stand out to view, and tears roll over the withered cheeks even while the trembling lips whisper, "Thy will be done."

CHAPTER V.

The Allied Sovereigns are "three pleasant fellows" in Paris after Waterloo—No joke when little Pashas have to be amused at Windsor Castle—Lord Palmerston's method of escape from a perplexity—Mr. Wilkie Collins takes the basket-chair on the balcony—Tells a tale of a spider-swallower—Sir Edwin Landseer shows how a woman's skin can be turned to account—Sir Edwin, Mr. Millais, and Mr. Leighton join hands as critics of a picture—"I daresay we each think we could put it right?"

ALTHOUGH these runs out of Town were much appreciated by some of us, there were Londoners who did not view them in the same light, and I wrote about this time the following lines *à propos*, which appeared in the "World":

ONE QUIET DAY.

My poor exhausted friend, you write
The season's ding-dong at its height,
You're "nearly done for, if not quite"—
I'm here to say
Come down to us and spend the night
And one long day.

Give up for once the early call;
The long, long dinner, late, late ball;
The "Private View" and "First-night Stall";
Park lounge and band;
State festival in courtly hall,
Gay four-in-hand.

The dress, dress, dress, from morn till night;
The talk, talk, talk, from dark till light;
The toil, the hurry, and the fright
(Most potent spur)
Of being absent from the sight
Where others were.

Put by for once St. James's airs,
The eyeglass, and the freezing stares,
The suit just fit for easy chairs,
Two fingers numb,—
Be as you were in other years,
Old fellow, come.

* * * * * * * * *

What? You have long engagements made?
Notes to be written—visits paid?
Business that cannot be delayed?
Not really? What?
Your friends would miss you, you're afraid?
—Why should they not?

You say you'd like our quiet yews,
Our grassy meadows where the dews
So quickly melt that you could snooze
All day i' the sun;—
But as it is you "Must refuse,"
"It can't be done."

You say you're weary of the fray,
Your ears are sickened with the bray
Of endless Jubilee. Hooray!
Now do come down.
—Oh, you don't really see your way
To leaving Town?

Well, Charley boy, I will not press;
It only bores you. I confess

I thought you'd leave that seething mess
  For just *one* day.
I see it's hopeless. Well, God bless
  You anyway!

Mary and I did not live in a "Seething mess," but still we had to arrange a little beforehand for the quiet day to which we were invited by some friends of hers called Cole, living near Winchfield. We did arrange however, and were duly rewarded.

Mr. Cole was a delightful person to meet, as though grown old and talkative by this time, he had been young and active once, and met with many adventures in days gone by.

At the very early age of sixteen he had entered the army in the "Waterloo year," but was such a little fellow that the authorities would not send him out of the country,—wherefore he was left to eat his heart out at home, while others were winning their spurs on the great battlefield. To his latest day, he vowed he would still lament that lost chance of death or glory.

He was however sent to Paris, when the Allied Sovereigns were there, and was lucky enough to be one of the escort told off to attend them wherever they went.

But the three crowned heads were not to be always tethered to an escort; occasionally they contrived to give it the slip, and go about incognito.

"It might have been dangerous, only they had their wits about them," said Mr. Cole; "and they knew their way about, too. I assure you, they managed very cleverly. Of course we did keep an eye on them without their knowing it, and one day this led to our witnessing a comical little scene. They, the Sovereigns, having got among some streets unfamiliar to them, lost their bearings and appealed for aid to a man they met, who looked like an Englishman, and was therefore to be relied upon.

"The stranger readily complied with their request to put them in the right way again, and further proffered himself as their guide for a bit.

"Mutually pleased with each other, they chatted freely of this thing and that, and on parting the Englishman made what for an Englishman was a great effort at *bon-camaraderie*. He looked from one to the other and said cordially, 'You are three pleasant fellows, and I should like to know your names.'"

With equal frankness, they replied:

"I am the Emperor of Russia."

"I am the Emperor of Austria."

"I am the King of Prussia."

"Oh, indeed?" Their friend laughed good-naturedly, and made them a deep bow. To carry on the supposed jest he volunteered, "And I am the Grand Mogul!"

Whether he ever learnt the truth or not, Mr. Cole did not know.

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A Colonel Lindsay who was present—a very tall, fine-looking Guardsman—had now his turn.

"Royalties are fond of their little jokes," said he. "But I had to take involuntary part in one lately, and I assure you at the time it was no joke to me. You know the Sultan went down to Windsor the other day, and it was my turn to be in waiting;" (he was a gentleman-in-waiting on the Queen,) "well, the Sultan took his little sons with him," continued he, "the eldest of whom is twelve, the other, ten; and when they had been presented to the Queen, Her Majesty said to me, 'Will you contrive to amuse these little princes for a while?'

"Accordingly I took them away into another room," continued our colonel, "and asked them what they would like to do? They were dear little chaps, and not a bit shy. They looked round, and seeing an open piano, the elder went straight for it, and began to play a polka. Then he nodded at us, and said, 'Now, you dance.' Good heavens! Of course I could dance, but at that hour of the day, and with a little bit of a boy for partner—he scarcely reached above my waist! However there was nothing for it but to comply, and we set to work jogging and bobbing ;—but you may guess I was hot and cold ; and every time there was a sound in the corridor, I felt regularly faint with fear lest the door should open! And I did not dare to laugh, for the little Pashas were as solemn as judges. To have laughed would have given dire offence. I really think that was the longest half-hour I ever spent in my life, though ;" wound up Colonel Lindsay, shaking his head.

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Driving along Piccadilly one day, we saw quite a number of well-known faces, and suddenly Mary exclaimed, "Quick, look, there is Lord Palmerston. I know the man he is walking with," she went on, "and as he is dining with us next week, I shall ask him to tell us what 'Pam' and he were laughing at just now? Did you see how amused they both looked?"

When the night of the dinner-party came, she did not forget to interrogate her friend, but at first he could not call to mind anything particular to have caused merriment. On a sudden however he exclaimed, "Stop a bit, I believe you must have seen us just after we had parted from an acquaintance of 'Pam's'—though as *he* couldn't remember the name, I fear *I* can't give it you,—"

"That's all right," interposed Mary, gaily, "never mind that. What I want to know is, what were you two saying to each other that made you laugh?"

"Why, it was about that very third person, who shall be nameless. He had stopped us, and addressed Lord Palmerston, who said cordially in return, 'How are you? And how is the old malady?'"

"Better, thank you;" said the man, and went on his way.

"Now, I wonder who that is," murmured Lord Palmerston, "I very much wonder who that is."

"Don't you know him, then?" cried I, astonished. "And yet you asked after his malady!"

"Oh, *that* is a safe question. A perfectly safe question. Did you ever know a man of his age who had not a malady? Call it an 'Old malady,' and you have hit the nail on the head."

"And as we both laughed at this," proceeded the narrator, "it must have been just at the moment when your carriage went by."

Oddly enough, his name I have also forgotten, but alack! it is, I fear, too late in the day for the great Prime Minister's hint to be of use in this case.

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Besides, he was not in himself an interesting personality, and we had at table Mr. Wilkie Collins, who afterwards came out upon the balcony, and talked, and talked.

A warm summer night on a London balcony, the scent of flowers on every side, and the celebrated novelist in a retrospective and expansive mood—that is what I see before me when my outward eyes rest upon the "Woman in White" or "The Moonstone" upon the upper bookshelf to which they have been relegated by the enlightened novel-readers of to-day.

It may be that they are right, that we were childish to be thrilled by the latter, or terrified by the former—altogether enthralled for the time being by both,—but yet, shall I dare to say it?—it seems to me that present-day readers and writers alike miss something, some subtle, intangible bond of union between the two, which drew them together in former years.

Young readers at least were not so critical, not so analytical,—and when great, strong notes were struck, though it might be harshly and crudely, they vibrated through the inmost fibres of our being, and we kissed the hand that smote us. They do not smite, and we do not kiss, now.

Mr. Wilkie Collins was not a giant to outward view. Indeed he was rather a small man, with short, dark hair, and a brownish beard and moustache; while the large spectacles he habitually wore did not disfigure him, as one could see the pleasant expression of the eyes beneath.

I was sitting on a footstool near an empty basket-chair when the gentlemen came up from their wine—a portly dowager who had been occupying the latter, obviously to her discomfort, having just found a better anchorage for herself elsewhere—and I wondered who was to be her successor?

There was no one at the party who was of the least account in my eyes,—as girls call "Account,"—and accordingly I was well pleased that Mr. Wilkie Collins should subside into the basket-chair, and look very much as if he did not mean to be in a hurry to rise from it.

No doubt he thought that he had found a pleasant spot, and that it would be no great effort to talk to a slip of a girl for whom anything would do. Accordingly, he let himself go, in a nice, natural fashion that would perhaps have been out of place had his companion been a *grande dame*. His talk flowed gently back into time-worn channels; and when he found his very simple experiences of childhood and youth were sufficient, he woke them up one after another.

His school-days, he said, were for some time embittered by his having as a bedroom mate a great, hulking fellow, his senior by some years, who was a bully and a bad sleeper.

Since *he* could not sleep, no one else should—in especial, the little wretch who would have slumbered soundly under his very nose, if he had been allowed. The little wretch had a knack of telling stories, which he must be made to exercise for the benefit of his betters.

"Accordingly, sleepy as I was and often dead tired, I had to sit up and invent," said Mr. Collins, "and horrid it was, I can tell you. My tyrant made for himself a cat-o'-nine-tails; and as often as my voice died away, he leaned across his bed and gave me a cut or two with it which started me afresh.

"I cried, of course, what little chap wouldn't?—but all the same, I had no difficulty in making the story go, if only I were kept awake—and my tormentor saw to that.

"And do you know, I owe him a debt of gratitude," continued Mr. Collins, looking down on me thoughtfully, "though he little meant to do me a good turn, and was only bent on his own selfish amusement.

"But it is a fact that it was this brute who first awakened in me, his poor little victim, a power, of which but for him I might never have been aware. Certainly no one in my own home credited me with it; and when I left school I still continued story-telling for my own pleasure. After a while,—well, you know the rest,—" and he smiled and stroked his moustache.

Presently, as we were still unmolested, he dived again into his memory, and brought forth the following: "There was another boy at the same school who achieved notoriety in a singular way. He made a business of swallowing spiders!

"What's more, he made the business pay. Word was passed that Dick Somebody-or-other was going to swallow a spider, and that places for seeing the performance were to be had at one penny each. If the spider were an abnormally large one, prices went up to twopence, or even threepence. When the spectators had assembled, (and had paid their money,) and when every eye was fixed on the performer, he drew from his pocket a pill-box which he solemnly opened—taking his time over it, so that nothing of the show should be lost—and extracting a captive spider, placed it on his lips, and let it crawl slowly down his throat!"

What would have happened if the spider had declined to fulfil its part of the engagement, Mr. Collins protested he could not imagine—but it never did decline. Of that he was positive; and I gathered that he was one of the paying guests on every occasion when he could afford it. "It really was worth a penny," he said, laughing.

I inquired if anything were known of the after-life of this extraordinary boy?

"Oh, very much so," replied Mr. Collins, briskly, "he is still alive, well, and prosperous—in fact, one of the leading lawyers of the day. Perhaps his success in the spider business showed him how to turn ingenuity and enterprise to account, but I have occasionally asked myself, 'If I were to go to this big man some fine day, with a pill-box and a spider, and say, "Swallow me this for six-and-eightpence,"' what would be the effect? Would the old Dick respond, or would a new Dick have arisen, who knows not Joseph? And do you know, I dare not risk it!"

Thought I, "Surely Mr. Wilkie Collins might run any risk!"—but young people in the sixties were taught that such speeches were pert, and refrained.

When Mary stepped out on the balcony, later, she said in her own pleasant way, "I think I deserve to join you now, for I have kept off all other interruptions, and it was hard work doing it. Don't go yet, Mr. Collins, pray don't go yet."

"I am not going," said he, cheerfully, and talked on far into the night.

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Sir Edwin Landseer was at the next dinner-party we went to.

It was at the Lehmanns, and as we sat down, I heard our host address his neighbour thus. "Now, we'll see."

"See what?" said she.

He made no answer, but looked slowly round the table, his eyes resting significantly on one and another whose faces were familiar even to me, and I guessed what he meant. There were present three men who were accounted the three best talkers in London, and many had tried to gather together Mr. Millais, Mr. Browning, and Mr. Leighton round the same festal board, but tried in vain.

The Lehmanns had succeeded; and though each of the gifted conversationalists loved to take the lead, they all subdued their inclinations so courteously that no one of the three usurped more than his fair share of public attention.

Though we were only a party of twelve, we were rather squeezed together, so much so indeed that a jonquil which protruded from Mr. Browning's button-hole had its head snapped off by a thrust of Mr. Millais' elbow.

Regarding his loss philosophically, the poet turned it to account by narrating the following anecdote. "A city clerk," said he, "discontented with clerking, occupied his leisure hours with versifying, and took it into his head to have his efforts printed. One ran thus:

"I love the gentle primrose,
That grows beside the rill,—
I love the water-lily,
Narcissus and jonquil."

Being in haste to see this elegant effusion in print, he omitted correcting the proof, and for "Jonquil" there appeared "John Quill."

His horror may be imagined, but the thing was done, and gave rise to so much ridicule at his expense, and so many jokes at the suitability of the name to a quill-driver by profession, that he foreswore writing, or at any rate publishing, poetry in the future.

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As the party was small and informal, it chanced that Mrs. Lehmann was eating a prawn, and had her plate whipped away from her while her head was turned the other way, the skin of the prawn remaining between her fingers. She looked about her for some means of getting rid of it, but seeing none, turned to Sir Edwin Landseer, who sat beside her, and demanded, "What *am* I to do with my skin?"

"If it *had* been *your* skin," replied Sir Edwin, "I could tell of a very good use to put it to, but as it is,—" on which, of course, she cried out, and would have him tell what use he could have made of her skin?

"Well," he said, "I once went to visit a French sculptor, in Paris, who showed me how to polish marble with a piece of leather. I examined the leather to see what sort it was; and as it did not look like any ordinary kind, inquired if there were anything peculiar about it? I ought to add that the marble it had polished was exquisitely pure and white."

"Yes, it is peculiar," said the Frenchman, placidly. "Very peculiar. For it is *human skin*!"

"You may guess that made me start," proceeded Sir Edwin, "but I was to start still more, for without the smallest embarrassment my friend proceeded to unlock a cabinet, and take from it a roll of the so-called 'Leather,' saying, 'This is my poor first wife's skin.'"

"What could I say? I was so taken aback that I could only falter out that it was 'Very white.'

"That, however, did quite well, indeed it obviously savoured to him of appreciation; for, looking fondly at it, he sighed and murmured, 'It *is* very white; for she was a very fair woman.'"

"—And now, Mrs. Lehmann?"

"Oh, you shall not have my skin just yet!"—laughed she back.

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When we re-entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Lehmann showed us her picture by a German called Heilbuth, just painted.

Her dress was a robe of blue silk, cut square in front, with hanging sleeves—and she had on her lap a great Persian cat. Seeing we were not enthusiastic over the merits of the picture, and failing to extract compliments—for indeed she was done scant justice to—Mrs. Lehmann addressed herself directly to the three great painters, who had ranged themselves in the background, and giving them no loophole for escape, demanded their opinion.

Thus forced to speak, each had something to say in dispraise as regarded his own department of art.

"I don't like the hang of the drapery," said Mr. Leighton, tossing back his curly mane of hair.

"And I," said Mr. Millais, "think one arm is too long, and the hands are out of drawing."

Lastly there followed the very gentle voice of old Sir Edwin. "I put it to you all, can a large, heavy cat sit upon nothing? That purring creature, as you may observe, makes no impression at all on Mrs. Lehmann's dress! Besides," he added, stepping on one side to get a better view, "it really does not look like a cat at all."

This finished the case, as lawyers say, and the outspoken Mr. Millais thus addressed his colleagues in conclusion. "I daresay we each think that in half an hour we could put right what we see wrong?"—and as the other two only smiled, and neither protested, no doubt he had rightly interpreted what was in their minds.

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Mary had her portrait painted by Mr. Lehmann shortly after this, and very, very good it was.

She had a beautiful shape of head, and did not hide it by having her hair dressed high over frizzettes, as was mostly done at the time, but which would not have suited her style.

Her rather Oriental cast of countenance was also well set off by an Eastern burnous cloak, and the whole picture, both as to colouring and drawing, was a success.

She had, however, to give many sittings, twenty in all,—and with her active nature, would have wearied sadly but for the entertaining company of Mr. Lehmann.

She told us that at first it was not anticipated that so many sittings would be necessary, but that one day two critics came in, in the shape of Mr. Millais and Mr. Wilkie Collins, who both maintained that though the likeness was good, it was not a *pleasing* likeness.

Such an unfavourable verdict mortified the artist not a little—but it put him on his mettle,—and the very next day he began a second picture, of which she had said nothing at the time, as she felt he might not like it to be known.

This second picture was the one we all admired, and Mary owned that it was a relief to her that the faithfulness of the two friends bore such good fruit.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Emmanuel Deutsch tells of a tragedy that happened at the British Museum—Mary is bent on seeing "The Book of Enoch"—Mr. du Maurier takes a "rise" out his "dear little Emmanuel"—"That statue has no nose at all!"—Mr. Tyndall discourses upon his nights among the glaciers—Herr Joachim and his best fiddle—Mr. Arthur Sullivan's account of his earnings by very different musical works—Girls will not hob-nob with each other at the instance of their elders.

The British Museum is not what can be called a lively place, but as we were invited to go thither one day in good company, we did violence to other inclinations and went.

Terribly dry and musty the place looked; and the air without was fresh and exhilarating that bright May morning,—so that we mounted the time-worn steps with reluctance, and looked back with a sigh as we passed within.

Moreover we had on smart new frocks, as we were bound later for a luncheon-party, and would not have time to go home and change—wherefore it behoved us to keep a wary eye on projecting corners and dusty cases;—in addition to which I for one was haunted by the terror of leaving behind my cherished white parasol, by this time obtained, and the very apple of my eye.

It had already been lost at another place of the kind that week, and recovered,—but the British Museum was too vast a monster to be expected to open its jaws once it had swallowed such a morsel, and I had a vision of the dear parasol being exhibited as a relic of the nineteenth century, in ages yet to come, labelled "A lady's parasol, supposed to have belonged to—" someone not *me*, certainly. The thought was agony.

So that I did not show a very pleasant countenance when Mr. Emmanuel Deutsch, an important Museum authority, made his bow and took us in charge, (for it was to see him and the "Blacas Collection" we had come).

Place au Mr. Deutsch. He turned out to be quite "A little dear"; very small, very natty in his dress, and very unlike the dry-as-dust antiquity we had looked for. Indeed, in such an environment, he looked quite gay; he almost sparkled.

Soon I should have forgotten all about my parasol, if among other curiosities we had not been shown "A silver toilet-set of a Roman lady," which of course set me thinking my own thoughts again.

Had this poor Roman lady left her toilet-set in a shop to be repaired? Or at a friend's house, to be used as an extra on some gala occasion? And had she forgotten about it? And had it come to its present low estate through being purloined by some thievish underling, wise in his or her generation?

She could hardly have carried it about, and dropped it.

Mr. Deutsch was in the middle of a disquisition on some other exhibit before I came out of my dream.

The "Blacas Collection," although it was the magnet which had drawn Mary thither, did not interest me in the least. It ought to have been reserved for connoisseurs, I thought; people who like to pore over little old stones a quarter of an inch in size, engraven in such minute characters that most of our party had to peer through glasses to see on them anything at all.

The whole thing—I may say it now—was a dreary business so far as I was concerned, on that lovely, sunny morning; and every time we passed a window, my longing eyes turned to the blue sky outside. But before we left we did have rather a *chirp up*, when joined by a Mr. Winter Jones, the head of the library, who had a good deal to say for himself, and did not want to immerse us in "Collections," as did enthusiastic little Mr. Deutsch.

Mr. Jones did seem to understand that it is not given to everyone to draw the breath of life from curios, and that what was fun to his colleague might be death to some of us.

He told us a story of what happened lately to some people who came to the Museum to see a Mr. Hawkins, one of the curators, who lives in a house in the quadrangle.

Mr. Hawkins took his visitors, a brother and sister, across the way into the Museum, as there was something special they were desirous of seeing there.

While they were in one of the halls, a message came that he was wanted, and he had to hurry away,—but as he fancied he knew what the summons meant, and that he would not be detained long, he suggested that his friends should await his return where they were.

Unfortunately he forgot that the closing hour of the Museum was at hand, and being kept away about twenty minutes instead of ten, found on attempting to rejoin his party that the door of the room in which he had left them was locked! This, he presumed, meant that they had been turned out, and not perceiving them anywhere about, concluded they had gone home, and dismissed the subject from his mind.

But they had not gone home. Alas, poor young people, there was to be no going home for them that afternoon.

This was what took place. The brother and sister heard somebody come to the door of the large room in which they were busy inspecting some cases at the far end, but did not trouble themselves to look round,—(for which lack of curiosity they were to be severely punished)—since it led to a sound startling in their ears. The huge door was shut with a bang, and the key turned in the lock!

Instantly realising what had happened, they rushed to the spot; but too late, for all their shouting and knocking failed to elicit any response.

Well, they thought, this is a queer predicament,—but reflection calming their first emotions, they told each other that they need be under no real anxiety, as Mr. Hawkins would assuredly seek them out directly he was free.

As time went on however, and they heard a clock strike hour after hour, it was not possible to preserve this bold spirit, and a space of time followed, which they hardly cared to talk about, even after their release.

For of course release did come in the long run, and came in this wise.

Albeit the prisoners were of mature years, they still lived beneath their parents' roof, and it might have been supposed that their absence when dinner-time came would have called forth surprise, seeing that no intimation of it had been previously given.

But they were in the habit of going about together, and not being bound by rules and regulations, (the parents being of the easy-going kind,)—and it was not until another son came home from an evening party and found himself the centre of blank looks and uneasy speculations that any steps were taken.

"Why, it is past one o'clock!" cried he. "All the theatres are closed long ago, and they were not dressed for anything else!

"You sent to Mr. Hawkins, I suppose?"

Sent to Mr. Hawkins? No, they had not sent to Mr. Hawkins; they knew nothing about Mr. Hawkins.

The parents were now thoroughly alarmed; they had not heard a word about a visit to the British Museum, and had no idea in what directon of the vast London area to seek their missing offspring.

They hailed the idea of Mr. Hawkins with relief, but still it did seem odd—and they were alternately hoping and fearing when, weary and hungry and half-dead with cold—for it was a sharp night in February—the involuntary truants appeared.

How the author of their woe felt on finding out what he had done, our informant did not say.

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Mr. Jones told us that he himself was not in the least nervous when going about the Museum by night, as he often did in pursuance of his duty. He carried a large lantern in his hand, though he confessed that it threw but a dim light around.

Some of us asked whether he did not feel a thrill or two when passing between lines of huge stuffed animals, and whether he did not throw an eye over his shoulder to make sure that none of them were pursuing him?

At first he laughed, then said gravely, "I can tell you, they do make strange noises, though. If I were of the 'Jumpy' sort, I should often start, for sometimes they creak and crack for all the world as if they were trying to burst their skins and get out!"

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Before we left the Museum, we heard Mary making an appointment with Mr. Jones to return there within a few days—but I for one elected that she should keep this appointment by herself. Twice in one week was more than flesh and blood, at least *my* flesh and blood, could stand of that great solemn charnel-house, and of Mr. Jones, nice as he was.

Mary, however, had set her heart on reading the "Book of Enoch," which was being much talked about among her learned friends, and as that could not be done while she had a troop of feather-headed damsels in her train, she let us drop her at the corner of Oxford Street and go off to the Park, there to disport ourselves till she was ready to be called for.

"Only don't forget me, and let me be locked up like that unfortunate couple," adjured she,—but I don't think even her ardour in pursuit of knowledge would have chained her to the "Book of Enoch" beyond the time appointed. Mary's enthusiasms were distinctly of a feminine nature, effervescent.

She told us about it with zest, however.

Mr. Jones got out the famous book and found a nice arm-chair for her in the Council Room, when he directly made himself scarce and she was left to enjoy herself.

Presently however she was aware of the presence of new-comers; and looking round beheld Mr. Grote, the historian, in company with Lord Stanley—both of whom she knew by sight, though they did not know her.

Nevertheless they were manifestly curious as to what a woman, ("And a fine woman, too!" we, her auditors, mentally commented at this point,) could possibly be doing there, absorbing something out of a book upon her knee?

Accordingly they circled round, casting inquisitive glances; but as the object of them took no notice, and was apparently lost to the outer world,—(she was *not*, but how could they know?)—they had no choice eventually but to retreat unsatisfied.

"But I daresay they got hold of that book afterwards!" quoth Mary, astutely.

We inquired what the "Book of Enoch" was like?

"Very like the 'Book of Revelations,'" replied she, "only wilder in style. And," she continued, "in it the verse in Genesis, 'Enoch was not, for God took him,' is not to be taken literally, but as an episode in the life of the holy man, who was taken indeed from earth, but returned to it, and lived for many years thereafter."

"Of course, no one can be certain that the 'Book of Enoch' is genuine"; proceeded Mary, very much in earnest and looking at us for sympathetic interest,—but I fear, I greatly fear, that (such is youth) she did not altogether obtain it.

We were ready to believe or disbelieve. It seemed to us, as perhaps it seems to some of you young ones now, not a matter of vital importance. And when our dear Mary proceeded to argue the point, I am inclined to think that our thoughts wandered. St. Jude may have referred to a prophecy of Enoch's, and this may prove that some such prophecy did exist,—but it was luncheon time, and we were hungry, and what was worse, the sky was getting overcast, and we had feathers in our hats. Mechanically we said "Yes" to everything, and to be honest, I know no more of the "Book of Enoch" to this day than I did then.

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But years afterwards I saw the "Treacle" Bible in the British Museum, and actually went there for the express purpose of seeing it.

Many people know, but more still do not, that there exists a Bible of ancient date, in which there is a quaint version of the text, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" It is rendered "Is there no *treacle* in Gilead?"

How many copies of this Bible there may be, I do not know; but one is kept in the library of the British Museum, though not, I think, for public inspection, since a certain great lady invited me and my daughters to be of her party to see it.

Following our leader, we all said "How interesting!" in the fervid accents of much-enduring Royalty, and instantly passed on. To everything else that followed, it was likewise "How interesting!"—and it was lucky if we remembered anything at the end of our tour that we had seen at the beginning. The "Treacle" Bible alone stuck by me, and remains.

Nor am I without a purpose in acknowledging this. What a stupid mistake we make in trying to cram piecemeal into our heads a jumble of impressions, supremely interesting individually, but totally disconnected with each other! What dull, listless, bored countenances one sees at places worthy of better things! What lagging footsteps wander round cases teeming with beautiful, wonderful, and valuable treasures! What furtive yawns have to be suppressed, when perchance a genuine enthusiast conducts the party!

He sighs, too.

He has not swallowed the whole thing at a gulp; truly not. It has taken him wellnigh a lifetime of patient study and minute investigation to master even a portion of the contents of that rich storehouse, and he feels with a sense of despair that his poor words are powerless to touch you, and that your utter indifference almost palsifies him.

It *is* utter indifference, and he knows it. Your feigned alertness, your ready "How interesting!" pumped up for each occasion, do not take him in. He is not deceived by your artless endeavour to formulate inquiries which shall not betray your ignorance.

For him, the penalty of being your instructor is even greater than for you, that of being his pupil. You have no sensibilities to be wounded; you go your way, and are only conscious that a wearisome duty, a dull task, has been performed,—but for him, he has been hurt to his heart's core. It may be that his dearest earthly affections have been trampled upon.

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I have not yet done with Mr. Deutsch, though what I have now to say about him is only as narrated by his friend, Mr. George du Maurier.

We met Mr. du Maurier at a house in the suburbs, where we went to spend the afternoon sitting in the garden. Thus we were all lazy and happy, and Mr. du Maurier especially so, as at present his eyes are weak, and he has to refrain from using them, and wear thick, blue spectacles.

In consequence, he is glad just to sit and talk, and his wife is on the lookout for any distraction of this sort which keeps him from fretting.

As something was said about Mr. Deutsch, "Ha! Emmanuel Deutsch!" said he, "dear little Emmanuel, how I love him! And I have had some fun out of him, too. I must tell about a week we spent lately together in Paris," continued he, nursing a leg across his knee—"It was really droll, that week. Deutsch thought he had scored off me at first, and so he had—but I turned the tables on him in the long run. I'll give you the facts, and you can judge!"

"You know, of course," he began, in a leisurely tone, "that Deutsch is a Jew? Well, I took it into my silly head that I knew something about Jews, so pretended to know a lot more than I did and tackled him about the 'Talmud.' What I did *not* know was that friend Deutsch had made the Talmud the study of his life, or you may guess I wouldn't have touched it with a pair of tongs. Of course I came to grief. Deutsch was at the very moment writing a book upon the subject; and as I was floundering from one quagmire to another, he was down on me like a load of bricks. Indeed, he showed me up so mercilessly that I thought, 'I'll be even with you yet, my lad!'"

"So you see, I was on the lookout!" continued Mr. du Maurier, complacently, "and a few days afterwards, as we were talking together, about that confounded Museum he makes such a pet of, my opportunity came. We got upon the Elgin marbles, and Deutsch said, 'I know them all so thoroughly, that if I had your talent, du Maurier, I should draw them from memory.'

"'You would?' said I, and chuckled to myself. ('Now, I thought, I have you!')

"'Indeed I should,' said he, falling into the trap head foremost.

"'If you have so perfect a memory of those statues, Deutsch,' said I, 'will you put yourself into the attitude of Theseus?'"

Well, he did, according to his lights—but it was a queer conception.

However I meant to have him more than that, so let it pass and went on.

"Now, can you tell me what sort of a nose Theseus has? What shape is it?"

For a moment he pondered, then said confidently, "It is a Grecian nose, straight and long."

With that I jumped into the air, I could not help it. "I've caught you now, my fine fellow; I've caught you now!" I cried. "A Grecian nose, is it? Hey, man, *that statue has no nose at all*!"

"But though he was quite extinguished for the moment, he bore no malice," resumed Mr. du Maurier, presently, "and we kept on being the best of friends. He dined with us last night, and does not look well, low-spirited and that sort of thing, very unlike himself."

"Certainly not like what he was when we saw him a little while ago," said Mary, thinking of our day at the Museum, "he was quite sparkish then."

"He sparks up still, when the collar is off," rejoined Mr. du Maurier, "but then, it so seldom *is* off. He is wearing himself out over that book of his on the Talmud, the one that led to all our rivalry. Deutsch fears it will be years before it is finished, and that he may *go* out before it *comes* out. He harped upon the little mark people are able to leave upon the world, and the little good they achieve, after a whole lifetime given to work."

"What did you say to that?" inquired Mary.

"Something silly about its all being only a drop in the bucket. That's how I feel about it myself," he interpolated, with something of a melancholy smile, "Deutsch and I have that in common. What he said was, 'If I were only certain it was *in* the bucket, I would not mind so much, but often I fear it is only dribbling down the outside.' And this, although the dear little chap is being courted and flattered by all the savants of Europe! Well, all I can say is, he is not spoilt—"

"—Though some people say he is," put in Mary, smiling.

"He is not," said Mr. du Maurier, and as she in her heart entirely agreed with him they did not quarrel over it.

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In connection with Mr. Deutsch and science, it seems natural to speak about Mr. Tyndall, whom we met one night in a quiet way, about this time. Albeit he lives high upon a moor, and shuns in a manner the haunts of men, he proved a most agreeable, congenial companion,—and I have often noticed this about a recluse, that when fairly caught and caged, all that is formidable in him vanishes, provided his company is to his liking.

And it seemed this was the case on the occasion referred to.

Mr. Tyndall's kind face, full of expression, was also lit up by animation throughout the evening. It was hardly a handsome face, but one could not choose but look at it, —and then he talked so well, and so little for effect. He told us that he had just returned from Switzerland, where he had been making experiments among the Alps.

He had several times spent whole nights among the caves of the rocks, noting the glaciers for scientific purposes,—(his "Glaciers of the Alps" appeared in 1892,)—and a "Strange and rather awful experience it was," he owned, but did not enter into it in detail, in fact he could not, for the party was small, and was assembled mainly to hear Herr Joachim and Madame Schumann play.

The former's playing was, of course, grand, and gave rise to rather an amusing incident. One of our party, who did not know one note of music from another and made no bones about it, was yet sufficiently impressed to say aloud, "That is surely a very fine fiddle?"

With a fine sense of humour the hostess, a quick-witted woman, repeated this to the owner of the "Fiddle." "Ah!" exclaimed he, delighted. "He is then one who *understands* who *appreciates*. It is my *best*;"—and he begged an introduction; and as it could be but an introduction and no more owing to the exigencies of the case, the artless gentleman's reputation as a connoisseur was established.

Madame Schumann plays a good deal of her husband's music, and naturally plays it to perfection; but it seems she still persists in playing what he composed after the loss of his reason, which, sad to say, preceded by some years his death.

To the ordinary mind these strains are incomprehensible, as his endeavour was to make discords harmonise, an impossible task. I heard musicians whispering about this on the evening in question, and noted that every now and then they looked at each other and then at the piano—by which I gathered there was mischief at work among the discords.

There was a small dark man at the party, whom we had met before at the Hamilton's, and he had been presented to Mary as Mr. Sullivan. He too was great in the musical world ; Lady Anne King, who sat beside us, whispered that he had composed songs "Too lovely for words,"—and afterwards we learned that lovely words had also been written for them.

It was not for some years after this however, that Sir Arthur Sullivan's music, with or without words, brought him in anything more substantial than fame ; for I have heard that he was wont to say of himself at one time, that all his serious compositions put together yielded him but a paltry pittance as compared with the melodious operettas of "Pinafore," and its successors. This may or may not be true, but it was told me by one who ought to have known.

Lady Anne King, above mentioned, was interesting as a grandchild of Byron, but one could have wished to trace some resemblance in her contour to that of her famous grandfather.

She was pleasant-looking, and had sweet, natural manners ; but was so taken up by the music, (being very musical, though more of a listener than a performer,) that we did not have much intercourse, in spite of being placed side by side with that intent.

Girls will not always "Hob-nob" with each other as their elders arrange. Lady Anne soon found out my ignorance of music, and though she came afterwards to call on me, and we ran up a sort of friendship, it was an artificial one. If two people do not honestly care for the same things, and if one of the two cares for little else but one thing, the friendship dies.

CHAPTER VII.

An overflowing breakfast-party at the George Macdonalds—Mr. Haweis, in order to view the Boat Race at his ease, climbs on to the roof of the house—Mr. Charles Reade tells of an escape from truculent Arabs—"I deliberately took out my false teeth"—Magical effect of "Thou son of a pig!" in Arabic—Indian ants make "a complete digest of Indian law"—Tales of Kleptomaniacs—Mr. Reade descants upon his past successes, and failures.

In the spring following this, I saw my first Boat Race.

It was the usual kind of day for it, grey, cold, and dismal, with a nip in the March wind that made us shiver as we trotted down to Hammersmith.

The Race that year had to be rowed so early in the morning that we were to breakfast with the George Macdonalds, who had invited us and a good many others, to see the sight from their garden. Here a wooden stand had been erected, bright and festive-looking with red cloth; and before we went inside the house, we mounted to have a look round, and mark the lie of the land.

All was propitious for those who could get seats on the stand,—but the Macdonalds, kind, hospitable people, had in their usual free-handed fashion invited about twice as many people as could by any possibility cram on, and as they kept on arriving and arriving, we saw how it would be.

Nothing disturbed the equanimity of our hosts however; and as we went in to breakfast by relays, we all got fed and warmed fairly comfortably; but when we emerged again—well, really, it was uncommonly chilly in that garden, at that hour ; and the stand, red cloth and all, was an airy structure, so that no one was in a hurry to mount it—and in the end a number of us set about to fend for ourselves elsewhere.

In all, there were assembled about eighty people, and seats for fifty—that spelt exclusion for us younger ones, and we set our wits to work to remedy it. See the Race we must, and it was suggested, "Why not from the banks, like other people?"

If this had been said now-a-days, we should have been out in the crowd in half a minute—but we were Victorian, and hesitated. There were some engaging young men of the party,—and, well, it would have been more amusing outside the garden than in it,—still an appeal had to be made.

And it was made in vain—oh, very much in vain.

"Certainly not ;" said our elders.

Even kind Mary was shocked. But I think it was more on the Macdonalds' account than from an over-keen sense of propriety. Mary would have liked very well to have been herself in the thick of the fun outside, I daresay,—but the poor Macdonalds, who had taken so much trouble, and meant so well!

She saw at once it would not do ; and as she was always a personage wherever she went, she vanished into the interior of the stand with only a sympathetic, and could it have been a rueful glance? at those left behind.

Would she rather have made one of our merry troop in obscurity? She owned afterwards that she would. She saw well, and she was housed well—but we had the best time.

Headed by a little Mr. Haweis, a very imp of mischief and quite irresponsible, we ran about the garden, hopping up into trees and all sorts of places—and finally what did that gallant little lame man do but wriggle himself on to the roof of the house, and sit there at his ease, with his legs hanging down!

Years afterwards, when I met Mr. Haweis at one of Mrs. Vaughan's Temple garden-parties,—(when I was married, and he was married, and we were, or ought to have been, old and sober—I reminded him of this feat; but though I remembered him, he had, I must own, forgotten me; I had been only one of a pack of laughing girls, while he was, even then, beginning to be known as a wit, a preacher, and a Court favourite.

But I will not anticipate.

Though we lost for the time being our leader of the revels, we were not to be done out of our view of the Boat Race; and it ended in planks being hired from enterprising vendors outside, and formed into a sort of ricketty platform adjoining the lower hedge.

As the ground was not level below, and as there were many workmen, and none to the manner born, those planks kept us lively. Down they came, time after time, crashing and smashing among the flower-beds; and but that there were no flowers to speak of at that season, our frocks would have been in a fine state.

As it was, we rose from the earth, earthy, and with discoloured gloves. Pale pink and green gloves were worn that year, matching our hats and waist-ribbons,—and though green gloves may now sound "Too awful, too hideous," as I am told they do, I can remember when we thought them an elegant finish to a pea-green linen or muslin frock. Mohair also was a popular fabric, being both thrifty and smart—and why it has not survived, one can't think.

However, March being too cold a month for such light fabrics, we were probably encased in cloth or "Winsey" at the Boat Race party, and got no hurt by the vagaries of our planks; though our repeated disappearances evoked the sympathy of outsiders, especially of an honest working man on the towing path, who evinced his in a practical fashion.

Seeing my head bob up yet once again after a precipitous descent, he poked his cotton umbrella through the thick hedge dividing us, and invited me to steady myself, adding, "For you do look shaky-like, miss." Kind creature! I grasped the support, and either because it was sufficient, or because the impromptu platform had wedged itself firmly into the soft ground by this time, I shook no more.

The Race that year was won by Oxford, and as we were wearing Oxford blue, we were triumphant—without the ghost of a reason for being so.

But all girls are the same. See them at Eton on the fourth of June—see them at "Lord's" the first week in July! How bravely they flaunt the colours of the little fellow at their side; how lustily they clap, when he tells them to clap! It is Harry's or Bobby's side that has scored, or won, or done something fine of some sort, and *of course* it is splendid.

For my part, I like to see the enthusiasm, the glowing, ignorant enthusiasm of the sisters, and their mothers' air of pride. What would become of us, if the fond illusions of our homes were pried into too closely? I can hardly tell a bat from a ball myself, but I love to see the schoolboy on his great days, and to let him instruct me. He feels so big, and so happy, and so kind.

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Shortly after this, we had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Charles Reade, the novelist, and as we had all read that wonderful book, "Never too late to Mend," we regarded its author with much interest.

He was not the sort of man in appearance that one would expect, but who is? I can't imagine why, but I had expected a gaunt, frowning creature, with stormy eyes,—

instead of which we saw before us a jovial, rotund figure with a very small head, and that small head was for some occult reason reassuring. It seemed to say, "There's nothing formidable about me."

And then our new friend chose to wear such very peculiar shirt-collars! "Has he put it on hind-part foremost?" whispered a voice in my ear, "or is it the new fashion?" But I could not tell.

And I had no inclination to busy myself with Mr. Reade's collars, for Mr. Reade himself was talking and telling a story which I will transcribe here.

He said a friend of his had just returned from Palestine, where she had had an experience which might have proved a tragedy, but for a happy thought which came to her when things were at their blackest. She and her husband were camping out in rather an unsettled part of the country, but as there did not appear to be any Arabs about, the rest of the party, all men, thought she might safely be left for an hour or so, while they climbed a hill not far off.

She thought so too, and begged that no one would stay behind on her account. They had only been gone a short time however, when to her dismay horsemen appeared as if by magic close at hand, and with threatening countenances rode straight towards the tent where she sat in the entrance.

"What to do, I knew not," she related; "but my heart beat in my throat, as I realised that no help was to be had from without, and that if I were to escape from the dilemma, I must look to myself to do it. All at once an idea came. I rose and confronted my visitors. I looked straight in their faces, and deliberately *took out my false teeth*! I have a complete set," continued she, laughing, "and as I held it solemnly towards the amazed horsemen, it did the trick. One yell, and they were off like the wind!"

"Oh, no doubt I was held to be an enchantress, and the teeth to be my magical weapons, for the men were out of reach in a few seconds, and never returned,"—concluded the plucky lady, chuckling.

Of course we all applauded, but one or two looked meditative.

Why do people make such a mystery of false teeth? I fancy that several present were considering if any amount of peril would have made them hold theirs out to view?

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This anecdote about the Arabs led to a contribution from little Mr. Deutsch, who was present. He also had been thrown on his own defence amongst them, and had contrived by presence of mind to turn the tables; and though there was only unpleasantness and not danger in this case, he seemed to have been rather on the spot! At Alexandria the custom-house people were provocative and disagreeable—and on being remonstrated with, turned rude. "And they are fierce fellows when their blood is up, and it is very easily up," interpolated he. "One great surly brute was making a nuisance of himself, throwing our things about all over the place, and turning them upside down as often as not; and we had delicate instruments with us, which might have been damaged irremediably; so I felt that it had to be put a stop to, and stooped over him to whisper in his ear. You should have seen the effect of that whisper! The man's face changed, his voice changed, his whole manner changed like lightning!"

"What had you said?" inquired Mary, speaking for all.

"I said in Arabic, '*Thou son of a pig!*' That was all: but it was just what his own countrymen would have said, and what no foreigner would—and it went home. There was nothing but cringing and obsequience for us all from that time forward."

Mr. Deutsch also related this: He was alone in an Arab village, and the Sheikh came out of his tent, and without any warning cursed him before all the tribe. Evidently he had done something to rouse the great man's ire, for the latter's eyes flamed, and the poor, unoffending little scientist felt he was in a tight place.

He was busy copying a Phoenician inscription at the time; and whether or not they suspected him of some dark design in doing this he could not tell, but judged it best to take no notice till things developed.

The Sheikh, probably further exasperated by such a stoical demeanour, continued to curse, and alleging that this was an enemy of their religion and altogether an abomination, wound up by proposing that he should at once be got rid of.

"That looked black for me," owned Mr. Deutsch, "for I understood every word, though the rascal did not dream as much, and continued his abuse freely. However, I took some comfort in the fact that I could at least *startle* him, so looked round to see if there were any friendly face among all the hostile ones, and breathed a sigh of thanksgiving when my eye fell on a sweet young girl gazing at me pitifully.

I addressed her at once, in Arabic. "Please," said I, "give me some water?"

And once again the magic Arabic proved my rescue. The very Sheikh himself, as if confounded, stopped dead. All present looked to him for a lead, when after a momentary wavering, he waved assent to my request, and the nice little girl at once seized a bucket, and ran for the water.

"No water ever tasted better to a thirsty man than that did to me, who was *not* thirsty," concluded Mr. Deutsch, with a gentle sigh of satisfaction, "for when I looked up from my bucket, all was changed. Friendly faces beamed around; and foremost among them was that of the grim chieftain. From that moment, he and his adherents beheld in me a brother!"

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Perhaps it was because this found a ready audience, that others now started story-telling, and some one—I forget who—gave us a quaint little anecdote of ants in India, who appear to be the most voracious and destructive of insects. An English barrister, practising in Bombay, had occasion to refer to a law report which had not been opened for some years.

Having taken down the book containing it from a high shelf of his bookcase, his amazement may be imagined at finding that within the cover, which was intact, there was no book at all! It was a case of "Vox et praeterea nihil"—only for "Vox" read "Vol.!" "The ants," observed the lawyer, telling the tale afterwards, "the ants, wonderful creatures, had made a *complete digest of Indian law*."

A new voice now spoke, and we had something quite different, from a Mr. Mark Collet, an old friend of Mary's, who often came to see her at this time.

"I met a man I knew this afternoon," said he, "who told me a droll thing. He was at a dinner lately, where on the re-forming of the men after the ladies had left the table, he found at his elbow a neighbour whom he knew to be a kleptomaniac, and altogether not quite responsible, though able to go about. His infirmity was so well known that my friend thought he would keep his eyes open, as there might be fun going.

"And sure enough there was. No sooner did the other think himself unobserved, than with the utmost adroitness, he inveigled a silver spoon up his sleeve, while looking straight in front of himself with an innocent and abstracted air.

"It was obviously a shock to be nudged by his neighbour, who whispered confidentially, 'So *that's* how you do it, is it? Well now, when *I* want a spoon, I take it like this'—and seizing one off the table, he stuck it in his buttonhole as if it were a flower.

"Then he looked at the less skilful thief triumphantly, and his exultation was more than could be borne. At once the poor thief succumbed to the temptation, and letting *his* spoon slip from his sleeve, he attempted to imitate the clever new device which greatly took his fancy. But, alas! He bungled, and it clattered to the floor! And though everybody tried to take no notice, and the servants picked up the spoon, the poor gentleman felt that he had failed, and missed his golden opportunity after all," concluded Mr. Collet's narrator.

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Years afterwards, this little comedy was brought to my remembrance by being myself the recipient of attentions from a kleptomaniac.

I was only one of many; and the thieveries were so extraordinary in the circumstances that I must describe them.

An elderly widow lady of high position in a country neighbourhood was afflicted with the distressing mania above alluded to. She was rich, and high-born; she was absolutely sane on every point but the one,—so that the spectacle of her dignified figure, with its stately movements and trailing train, plying a nefarious trade among friends and neighbours, was at once ludicrous and pathetic.

As in the case of Mr. Collet's hero, the poor lady had a certain vague sense of doing something which would not quite bear inspection, and strove with all the little art in her possession to achieve her end unobserved—being meantime bland and gracious to all around.

Her manners were fine—of the old school. She had the marvellous memory of an important personage for faces, and directly her eyes fell on yours, it recalled family circumstances into which she inquired sympathetically and minutely, the while her hand strayed toward your pocket. It gave you a queer sensation to feel it there.

But the correct thing to do was to take no notice; and as the interview was speedily brought to a close after its purpose had been accomplished, you were free to go in search of the person who could and would redress your injury.

This was her ladyship's companion; a quiet woman, never very far off, whose office was no sinecure at any time, and whose work was cut out for her on gala occasions.

To this guardian angel you made known your loss; and a full description of it, together with your address, was instantly noted down,—while if it were your purse which had disappeared, you were supplied with any money necessary. The next day, the lost purse with contents intact, would be restored to you.

But it was not always a purse, or anything of value, that excited the unfortunate dame's cupidity.

On one occasion, that of a croquet-party, it was a trifle in the shape of an elastic "Catch" for the skirt, which had just been invented for croquet players, and cost about a shilling. Probably because it was a novelty it attracted her, and word was passed that she was on the prowl.

She had already secured two, purposely laid in her way, "For I would give her anything or everything rather than have her feeling round me!" shuddered one sensitive creature, while there were many who felt the same.

For myself, directly I heard this, I made haste to unclasp my own belt, and let the "Catch" slip on to the turf, where it lay glittering in the sun. The bait took. The next instant it was gone!

Before the party broke up about half a dozen of these utterly worthless articles had been looted; and though bits of them were quite visible dangling from beneath a gorgeous cloak, and though we had ruefully to hold up our frills and flounces out of the evening dew in consequence, we waved farewell to the noble dowager as she rolled off elate with success in her great barouche—and pity mingled with our mirth.

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I must now return to our dinner-party. It would seem as if we were always at dinner-parties, or at least, that all I ever heard worth repeating was said at them.

But Londoners both past and present will understand this. Throughout the day they are seldom at leisure, they are hurrying forward, ever forward,—it is only when the strain relaxes and the halter is taken off the neck, that there comes the sense of peace and ease which opens the heart and unlocks the lips—to any purpose.

When I looked around at Mary's table or at other tables of the kind, it was plain to me, even to me, that many of the faces, mild and genial then, had been knitted in thought or fretted by care throughout the day; that albeit the brows were unbent, they were wrinkled so deeply that they could never be smooth again; and that there were long-drawn lines at the corners of smiling mouths.

Even we ourselves, in our pleasant, quickly-passing hours, found but scanty time for repose. We had not the goal they had to struggle for, still we toiled. Our interests were so manifold, our opportunities so tempting, and the attractions of every-day life so incessant and so varied, that looking back, I can see what a scamper it all was, and were I to moralise,—but that is not my purpose. At least we brought our pitchers to be filled at no mean sources, and *something* may have been gained thereby.

I see I have barely mentioned Mr. Charles Reade in this chapter, and yet he was undeniably the hero of the hour at Mary's party. He was then at the height of his popularity and success as a playright, and having out-stayed most of the guests on the evening in question, he evinced an amiable readiness to talk about himself. Indeed, he grew extremely animated, not to say pugnacious—showing that he could not stand criticism, far less opposition.

Frankly, his manners were not good. There was a certain roughness about them which jarred—which always does jar—upon women. He expected to lay down the law and have it accepted as such without demur.

As I was a humble admirer of "Christie Johnstone," which in my heart I preferred to "The Cloister and the Hearth," I was ready to put up with anything, but I saw Mary hide a smile, though "Funny old dear!" was all her subsequent comment.

Somebody else observed that Mr. Reade "Smacked of the stage!" Now, he did—that was precisely what he did. It would seem as if no one whose life is in close touch with that of the green-room can ever help showing it.

They may try, and think they succeed. They may watch their every word and gesture. They may be dressed by the best tailors and dressmakers, but there is a something that betrays them, and *that* invariably when and where they least wish to be betrayed.

Let me try to make my meaning clear. We had before us a genius, and no one thought of denying him to be one. But although a genius is permitted to be unpolished, though he may be odd, abrupt, and untrammelled by conventions, he should, I think, be natural. He should not strain after effect, and speak for the gallery. And while we all remember that of the immortal Garrick it was said that it was only when "Off the stage that he was acting," we must also remember that this was accounted a defect—yes, even in that artificial age, a defect in his character.

There is nothing that so prejudices youth against age, as a suspicion that age is trying to *show off*. I had a distinct impression that our celebrity of the evening was bent on showing off, and this may account for my finding his personality less attractive than that of many others without a tithe of his powers.

And he really laid himself out for our entertainment. As long as everybody would listen to him and to him alone, he was pleased and communicative, sitting up on the edge of his chair and pouring out details of past successes and failures—to do him justice, as ready to relate upon the one as upon the other.

He was also ready for any praise, even from insignificant lips. "You like Christie Johnstone? Bravo!" cried he, patting my shoulder. "Oh, you are a Scotch lassie, are you? Fine country, isn't it? And they are grand, those fisher-folk, aren't they? Yes, Christie and the herring shoal—that was true, every bit of it. I was there myself,—for I lived some time among them, getting together materials for the book—when word was brought Christie privately, (though not through her brother, but that's no matter,) that the shoal was in the Firth, and I saw her fly to get her boats out. It *was* a sight when those boats came in. She had regularly cornered the market, she, a mere strip of a girl!" he tossed back his mane, and his laughing eye roved into the past.

"Did you hear what the critics said about yon?" Presently he looked round with a curl of the lip. "They didn't take kindly to Christie, I must tell you. So they said that I hadn't the art of 'Compounding good materials,' and suggested that I should associate myself with certain authoresses who could compound, but lacked the materials. One sentence was very neat," subjoined he, "I know it by heart, of course—for it stung. This was it: 'He has plenty to tell us, but cannot tell it; they have nothing to say, and say it to perfection.'"

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Mr. Reade also told us that although the book, "Never too late to Mend," was written in 1856, and the play founded on it immediately afterwards, no manager could be found to accept the latter for seven years!

For seven long years it lay by in a drawer, and meanwhile amidst a host of tales and magazine articles there was born "The Cloister and the Hearth," which ran as a serial through several numbers of "Once a Week," under the title of "A Good Fight."

"But all the time I was dying to get my drama acted," confessed he, honestly, "and it has always been so. I have never cared for the success of a novel, as compared with the success of a play. I—well you see, it's just this; there's a glamour about the footlights, and the thunders of the audience if all is going well, and the devil's own torments if it isn't, that fairly beats anything else to smithereens. Of course it's but a small world you reach at the moment; of course, for every individual that hears your play, you have a host that read your novel, but then your readers don't call out—"

"Oh, yes, they do." And we all called out, and clapped our hands; whereupon the speaker, who had really not meant to fish for compliments, actually coloured up, and looked not a little pleased.

CHAPTER VIII.

A pompous City banker in a new light—An epicure and a haunch of venison—The majestic scholar and the pert clerk—"An expense *your* executors will never be put to!"—Dean Alford and Dr. Guthrie—"I don't wonder at King Saul's throwing the javelin!"—A beautiful song beautifully sung, wins votes from the fishers of Fife—Dr. Guthrie relates his discovery of Isabella Fyvie as an authoress—A tale of a poor country parson in a big country house.

It is not, I think, the really great things, the important thing in our lives, which oftenest leave the most indelible imprints on Memory. It is the very, very small happenings of childhood and youth, the foolish little episodes which no one knew of but ourselves, the jests in which we alone saw a point, the nicknames which had no origin except for those who gave them—it is those which stick fast to us through life, and start to view when least expected.

The trumpery mischance that befel a tutor or a governess, the ridiculous misnomer of a servant, a silly speech, a wrong accent—anything will do that amused us once—we cannot forget it, and we never do.

And the games we invented for ourselves, when left to ourselves, unmolested by our elders, had they not a flavour all their own?—and do we not, some of us, still recognise the flavour, and relish it? It is in the hope that such as do will not spurn the following little tale, that I dare to tell it.

The little tale relates to a person by no means little. He was a big and portly City banker, rich, charitable, all that a City banker ought to be—but young people did not crave for his company. As he was a near neighbour of Mary's however, and as she greatly respected him, we had to endure it in our own fashion.

But one day, one awful day, he made a suggestion that filled us with dismay. Chancing to overhear that we, my sister and I, were to be left to spend the evening by ourselves, not having been invited to accompany our elders elsewhere, he, doubtless in the kindness of his heart, volunteered to take us for a ramble in Kensington Gardens, "To see the flowers." There was no getting out of it, and off we set.

It was a heavenly evening, and the gardens, luxuriant in bloom, were certainly worth seeing; also the air, after a day of heat, worth breathing. As well as we knew how, we talked to our big friend solemnly and paternally stalking alongside—but presently we started a little game of our own.

It was a sort of competition. Each tried which could detect the greatest number of humble sweethearts blissfully strolling about, or fondly leaning against each other on retired benches.

Our lynx eyes marked them down at every point of the landscape, and each couple counted "One" to the score of the first to claim it—while a red-coat counted "Two."

At the commencement of the game, we only whispered and tittered, suppressing all outward demonstration of what was going on—but presently, excitement rising, an incautious "Two!" burst forth irrepressibly, and had to be explained.

Imagine then our glee at finding it not only smiled upon, but sympathised with. Our elderly companion actually entered for the competition!

At first shyly and with a natural shamefacedness, carelessly throwing out, "I think I see a couple yonder?"—

or, "Suppose we look behind that tree?"—but a triumph or two undermined even his self-control and produced undeniable eagerness and alertness.

With joyful alacrity we yielded prior rights if we had any. We would have yielded anything.

We tramped and tramped, and had no sense of time. Our scores grew apace, and all that we thought of was to add to them.

To this end red-coats were of course in the greatest demand, and a glimmer of colour—it was *he* who saw it first!

His eyes flamed; he started forward; made sure; stamped his foot; whirled his cane round his head; bawled at the pitch of his voice, "Two!—*Two*!—*TWO*!"—when—oh, what a moment, what a moment!—out stepped from behind a bush and confronted him, him the magnate of Mark Lane, the awe-inspiring senior partner of the Bank—his own head-cashier!

The sky fell. We slunk home. We were very, very silent getting there. We tried to be unconcerned, but—we never played that game again.

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Certainly our unfortunate escort never gave us another chance to play it in his company, yet it had one good effect. He had shown that his outer crust could be broken through, and when he next came to the house we did not as before take the first opportunity of slipping from the room. In consequence, we came in for a good story once.

There was a certain Dr. Parr, a scholar and a bachelor, who, sad to relate, loved eating and drinking even more than the learned pursuits befitting his age and the learned University in which he lived. Wherever he dined, the cook had to be warned beforehand.

And the Doctor loved dining out, for why? He was not a bad old fellow in the main, and had plenty of friends. It was a pleasure to him to "Stretch his legs under their mahogany," and season a well-cooked, thoughtfully-elaborated dinner with genial discourse. No one could be a pleasanter guest when all was to his liking.

If on the other hand that were not the case, Dr. Parr took quiet note of the fact for future reference. He would not, if he knew it, again cross that doorstep; but as "the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley," he one day found himself doing the very thing he was determined against, having in a fit of aberration accepted a second invitation from a host by whom he had been maltreated.

Gloomily he viewed the prospect before him as he set out for his afternoon walk on the day in question; and taking the direction of the house he was engaged to, he peered down through the area-railings into the kitchen.

It was as he feared. There was no bustle of preparation, no savoury odour escaped.

Disgusted, the Doctor passed on; but stopped at the very next railings, for what did he see?

A haunch of venison, a lovely haunch, just being set down to roast before the fire! It was too much. His soul loved venison as did that of the Patriarch Isaac, and to be confronted by it thus? Not a moment did he hesitate, but mounted the steps and rang the door-bell.

"Madam," he said, making his best bow as he entered the drawing-room in which sat the lady of the house, "will you take pity on a lonely man, and have me to dine with you this evening?"

"Certainly, Dr. Parr, pray come," rejoined she, albeit somewhat surprised. "If you will be content with a family dinner, we shall be most happy to see you at seven o'clock."

"Oh, content—quite content!" nodded the Doctor, inwardly chuckling, and hurried away.

He was now elated. He had brought off a double event, evaded a so-so entertainment, and secured one to his taste. He made up an excuse on his way home, and punctually at seven repaired to the house which contained the beloved haunch. As he entered the hall, his nostrils told him it would be done to a turn.

But it did not appear. Soup and fish were disposed of, (the hostess having hastily added to her humble dinner out of compliment to the self-invited epicure)—and good roast mutton followed; but although the old gentleman squinted round, he could not perceive any other cover.

"You see your dinner, Dr. Parr," said his host, observing that the Doctor said "No," to the mutton.

"I know better," retorted he, and smiled slily.

"Know better?" Husband and wife glanced at each other, but as their guest smiled on, they tried again. "Is there anything else you would prefer, sir?"

"Why, yes; there is something I should certainly prefer; it is a slice of that fine, fat haunch of venison I saw cooking in your kitchen this afternoon."

The mystery was solved; at once a light broke in upon the perplexed pair, and perhaps a little malicious pleasure also stole into their breasts, for it was with no perceptible reluctance that the lady rejoined—"I am sorry we cannot offer you *that*, Doctor; for that haunch belongs to our next-door neighbours. It was cooked in our kitchen as their range is out of order, and they have a dinner-party to-night.

"They were expecting some very particular guests, so the venison had to be just right," subjoined she.

And he had been one of the "Very particular guests!"

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"Well," said Mary, "your learned Doctor certainly did not shine and was rightly served, but I can tell you of one of his kind, who lately came off best out of an encounter. He is Dr. Hume, and he cares nothing for his stomach, but a good deal for his dignity. One day lately he was under the necessity of going to the office of a newspaper, in order to insert the death of a friend among the obituary notices.

As he is one of the most silent of men, he simply placed the slip of paper containing the announcement on the desk in front of him, together with the fee of five shillings for its insertion.

The clerk glanced at the paper, turned it on one side, and said curtly, "Seven and six."

"Hardly that, I think," rejoined Dr. Hume, "I have frequently had occasion to put these simple notices in this paper, and never before been charged more than five shillings."

"Simple?" echoed the clerk, without deigning to look up. "Simple? He is 'Universally beloved and deeply regretted.' Seven and six."

But that young man had met his match. Calmly producing the extra half-crown from his pocket, the majestic Hume eyed the cock-sparrow on the other side of the counter, and addressed him with stern solemnity: "Congratulate yourself, sir, that this is an expense which *your* executors will never be put to."

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We were sitting indoors one pouring wet afternoon, having found it too dismal to venture abroad a second time that day, when sunshine entered the room in the shape of two visitors who had met on the doorstep.

Instantly we thought no more of the gloomy sky and dripping foliage, it was so unexpected to have Dean Alford and Dr. Guthrie walk in, both so bright and good-humoured and pleased to find us at home.

Mary explained that we had been out but returned early, as it was so cheerless everywhere and miserable for the men and horses besides.

"That's where we poor pedestrians have the pull of you," said the Scotchman, gaily, "You carriage folk sit and mope inside, or sit and shiver outside, but we foot it, and are as jolly as can be. I know these young ladies don't mind rain," and he turned to my sister and me. "Many's the day I have seen them walking about Edinburgh with their father under a pelting sky, and, thought I, 'Born and bred by Loch Lomond, what's rain to them?'"

"West country rain never hurts, you know," rejoined we.

"Rain does us no harm anywhere," pronounced Dean Alford, sententiously, "provided one doesn't sit with wet feet till they're cold,"—and as we were afraid this boded a speedy exit and our being left once more to our own devices of which we were heartily sick, we hastily turned the dean's attention to another subject.

But the great Scotch divine was certainly the better man of the two as regarded sociability.

In musical, sonorous tones, he was soon in the full swing of conversation, and a story he told of one of his brother-ministers pitted against an up-to-date American, was fully appreciated by us all.

Quoth the American to his clerical friend, "Why do you have such doleful Psalm-singing in your Scotch kirk?"

"Well, you see, we don't think it doleful," returned the other, cautiously feeling his way, "We are fond of our old tunes. And," brightening up, "they *are* very old, you know."

"I daresay. They are none the better for that." As was natural, the man from the New Country laughed at such a plea—but the minister had not done with it. "The belief is—mind you I am only telling you what the *belief* is among our poor people—that our tunes," slowly and impressively, "our old Psalm-tunes are the very ones that David himself played upon his harp!"

"Are they?" Quick as lightning the other turned upon him. "Are they? Then, by Gum, I don't wonder at Saul's throwing the javelin!"

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I mentioned Dr. Guthrie's voice; it had in it a resonant quality that made one feel that he must be able to sing, and yet I never heard that he could, or did. Later in life however, I fell in with several members of his accomplished family, and all were musicians. One daughter in particular, (if yet living, I hope that she will read this, and learn that I never forget her singing,) had a contralto voice, rich and deep, which not only delighted her friends, but did yeoman service among humbler audiences at a very important moment of her life.

Her husband wished to enter Parliament and was standing for the Fife Burghs, of which the main constituents were fishermen. During the canvassing, Mrs. Williamson went about everywhere with the candidate, singing at the various meetings held by him a plaintive sea-song, beginning,

"Thou art far away at sea, Fisherman, Fisherman,—
My blessing go with thee, Fisherman:"

in a manner to thrill the heart of every poor "Fisherman" present.

Her glorious voice vibrating through halls uncarpeted and uncurtained would doubtless be heard to great advantage; and hearkened to by a people passionately fond of music, would be not without its influence, (albeit an illogical one,) upon their votes. Be that as it may, the Fife Burghs sent up to the House of Commons an excellent member, and that member presented his wife with a set of diamonds which she herself told me was a token of gratitude for singing her song, "Fisherman, Fisherman," to the fishers of Fife.

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Dr. Guthrie was very tall and massive, but not stout like Dr. Norman Macleod. And he had a long face instead of a round, not to say square one. "Norman" always declared that he protested against his own face, and objected to sending his photograph about.

On one occasion, when the request for it emanated from America, and from someone who could not be disregarded, he turned testily—but jocularly, too—to his wife: "Can't you send my brother George? *He's* the beauty of the family."

And as Sir George, the eminent surgeon and one of the handsomest men of his day, came in the next minute, I think we all present felt that he might well be the beauty of any family. Let me recall him, as he presented himself to our sight then—as Memory presents him now.

Six-foot-two in his stocking-soles he stood, his fine head with its thick dark hair just dashed with grey at the temples was sharply cut out against an evening sky, and this also defined his absolutely perfect line of feature. "Norman" looked at him proudly and fondly. "Eh, George, but you're a fine man," he emitted in broad Scotch; and the brothers, between whom there was a great affection, laughed together.

This is a digression. This little scene had taken place several years before, and I must now return to our dean and our Free Kirk leader.

Presently the latter began to talk of a young authoress, Miss Isabella Fyvie, and a prize poem she had won—about which Mary seemed to know. Also about a story called "The Occupations of a Retired Life," written more recently, about which we all knew.

It was published under the sobriquet of "Edward Garrett," and Dr. Guthrie maintained that it was a very remarkable book for a young woman of Miss Fyvie's antecedents to have written.

Dr. Guthrie claimed to have "found" Miss Isabella Fyvie. She was living, he said, in complete obscurity, being the daughter of a small baker in the City, and chained to the shop by the death of her mother, who had been wont to preside there.

But where there's a will, there's a way, and the baker's slip of a daughter could not be selling rolls and buns all day long. She had to take a rest sometimes, and as sure as she sat down to rest, she took up a book. Her whole delight was in reading—and presently, in writing.

Whether the family knew of these predilections or not Dr. Guthrie could not tell, but one day some poetic effusions were brought to him through the medium of the post-box pertaining to the "Sunday Magazine," of which he was the editor.

Having nothing particular to do at the moment, he threw his eye over the pages, expecting nothing, he owned, from them—but was caught and struck by what he read.

True, the poems were crude and unpolished, but they possessed, he felt sure they possessed, the *real thing*, and forthwith he set off for the baker's shop.

He wondered afterwards why he did not send for the author of the MS. to come and see him,—but he had "A kind of instinct" that more would be gained by another method of procedure, though little anticipating the revelation which followed.

He found a tall, slight, young thing, with a beautiful little face, and a head well set upon her shoulders—in short, with all that was charming and attractive in a nimble shop-girl, but so young and presumably ignorant of life that to think of her as a poet fairly staggered him. As a fact Isabella Fyvie was seventeen, but did not look even that.

"I took her in hand," narrated he, "I had a good long, fatherly talk with her, and made her promise to write no more for a year, at the end of which time she was to come and see me. Of course she was to read in the interval—and to be released from serving in the shop. I made an arrangement with her father, and marked out a course of study, which she took to like a duck to the water.

"Conscientiously she fulfilled her part of the agreement, and presented herself at our office for examination on the appointed day. I was prepared for her—but not for what she had become. I was fairly amazed. She had progressed beyond my utmost hopes. At once I released her from my embargo, and the result you see in the 'Sunday Magazine.' We haven't had a better story in it for years than the 'Occupations of a Retired Life.'"

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"Dear Mr. Dean, haven't you anything equally nice to tell us?" said Mary, sweetly.

She thought the dean looked rather "out of it" while his friend had it all his own way; and indeed we subsequently found that the two did not altogether hit it off. Probably each was too much accustomed to being the centre of his own circle.

However, on finding himself directly appealed to, it behoved our little dignitary—and very little he looked beside the mighty Scot—to bestir himself, and he said hesitatingly, "I can give you no such accounts of budding genius as Dr. Guthrie has done, but it may just possibly amuse you to hear of a strange adventure which befel a very simple old country parson in our diocese, one deeply imbued with the notion that our race, as represented by the rich and great, is going to the dogs.

"Perhaps you can hardly realise"—and he looked from one to the other—"the absolute remoteness from, shall we say present-day civilisation, that prevails in some of our poor parsons' homes? They are apt to marry early, too early; and the struggle to make both ends meet, that can seldom be made to meet, keeps them from mixing with such of their old college friends and associates as would open their eyes.

"They can't afford to accept and return hospitality even on a moderate scale, and many of them have never been inside a large country-house as a guest, upon equal terms, in their lives.

"My old parson would never have thought of being invited to one, still less of accepting the invitation, but for a reason which has nothing to do with this story. It took him to a certain castle however, where was assembled a house-party,—and as he arrived about five o'clock, he found the men just returned from shooting and the ladies from driving, all being at tea in the hall.

"It seemed nice and sociable on a chilly November afternoon, and delighted to find such simplicity prevailing where he little looked for it, he partook heartily of cake, sandwiches, etc.

"At a little before seven o'clock some neighbours who were merely calling, took themselves off, and the rest of the company broke up, and retired upstairs, with bedroom-candles in their hands.

"'Well, this is nicer still,' ruminated my humble friend, and he rehearsed to himself the phrases he would use to describe the situation afterwards.

"He would emphatically repudiate the notion that the 'Aristocracy' kept late hours and were too much addicted to conviviality. He heard himself saying, 'Late hours, indeed? I haven't been to bed so early since I was a boy!'

"Just as he was stepping into a huge four-poster, and thinking how glad he was that the ordeal of the first day at least was over, the sound of a gong reverberating through the outer passages made him pause and listen—but concluding that it must be the 'Kettledrum,' a new thing he had heard about though never come across, he decided that it could have nothing to do with him, and that its being sounded was just one of the vagaries of the house.

"Accordingly he blew out his candle and went to sleep.

"He judged that he had been asleep some hours, when a renewed and violent explosion of the supposed 'Kettledrum' made him start up in bed, perspiring at every pore. What was the meaning of it? What terrible thing had happened? Could the house be on fire?

"Down he rushed to the housekeeper's room, finding the backstairs leading thither close by—and electrified the good woman by demanding breathlessly, 'What is it? What's the matter?'

"'Lor', sir, nothing ain't the matter, except,' said she, reprovingly, 'that you'll be late for dinner. The second gong sounded five minutes ago, and you're not half-dressed!'

"Such, however, was his speed on being thus enlightened and spurred to action, that he actually got into his evening clothes, and was in the drawing-room before half the other guests appeared. 'But,' said he, 'I never had the chance of delivering the speech I had so carefully prepared exculpating great folks from evil ways. And I am ready to believe anything of them after that—ahem! *Kettledrum*!'"

CHAPTER IX.

A relic of a childish past—Mrs. Proctor comes in the nick of time to carry us off to a notable garden-party—Mr. Samuel Rogers and his "Pity Me," notes—The hero of the "Rob Roy Canoe"—A certain Lady Frances tells of Prince Albert's visit to her Highland moor—He is not recognised by his hostess at a ball—"I hope your wife is well?"—The party breaks up—"The Princess is going!"—An ambassador bears a message from Lord Beaconsfield—Mrs. Proctor considers it *blarney*—"Ah, Mrs. Proctor, I could not despise Dizzy; no one could."

An aunt of mine brought in a curious relic to show us one day. "I thought these children might be interested in seeing it," said she. (Did all elderly relations of the Victorian era speak of the rising generation as "Children," I wonder?—but no matter.) "It has only come into my possession lately," continued my aunt, "and I find it very interesting."

As she spoke, she looked at my sister and me, and of course we had to find it interesting also; but we were unprepared for the wonderful little article which was now taken out of its wrappers. It was a casket covered with white satin, on which was worked in coloured silks little pictures after Watteau.

My aunt now proceeded to explain that the workmanship was by a certain very great-grandmother of ours, born in 1660, and that she had achieved it during the *doll* period of a child's life, as was clearly attested by the casket's contents.

There were two trays, each covered with white satin, and adorned with scraps of needlework. The top tray contained a set of tiny silver saucepans ; also a silver teapot and coffeepot ; the lower one, a number of silver plates and spoons, as diminutive in size as the rest. Underneath both trays was a pin-cushion, on which a pious sentiment was elaborately embroidered ; and by its side—most pathetic sight of all—a slip of paper, stained and yellow with age, setting forth that the good little girl of two hundred years ago had been presented with all the pretty things as a reward for being industrious with her needle.

As the casket had been kept in a glass case it was in a perfect state of preservation, yet somehow it looked quite different from the glass-encased relics at museums. It was such an ordinary little work-box, a thing of such trifling value that we hardly knew how to take it.

Were we to regard it with veneration, or indulgence? Why, and how, had it survived?

Relics of the past, heirlooms that have been handed down from one generation to another, have usually some intrinsic worth which has caused them to be cherished as treasures—but the treasure of a little girl who was not a princess nor a personage of any kind was not likely to be held in high esteem by her elders. Its preservation was a puzzle.

And later on I was to feel another survival of the kind another puzzle, when shown a cluster of Elizabethan cottages by the roadside in a remote nook of Kent.

What were they doing there when their betters, so many of them, had been swept away by the hand of Time? How small and humble they looked! How little worthy of notice—almost beneath contempt! Assuredly they had always been what they still were, the abodes of laboring men, and with the exception of a few figures deeply cut into stones over their doorways, had nothing to separate them from the ruck.

But those figures were distinctive ; we were told that no other laborers' cottages in England could claim to have been built in 1520, which was, I believe, the date over the doorways. If wrong, perhaps some kind reader will correct me?

Now, castles, palaces, sturdy strongholds of Elizabeth's sturdy time are not rare among us, but little four-roomed cottages, of no account in the eyes of the rich and great, might easily have sunk into decay without a hand being stretched forth to save them?

And their existence gives rise to another thought. It is the foolish gimcracks which we buy for a penny in the streets, not the costly and often vulgar elaborations of art commemorating great occasions which will be the rarities, the curiosities of our descendants a few hundred years hence! The trumpery is bought by the million, but hardly one tin-tack in a million survives. The first adverse breath, and they are thrown upon the dust-heap. A penny "Jubilee" mug is not common even now.

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Feeling a little pensive and subdued, (probably for reasons quite unconnected with the casket, though this was nobody's business but our own) my sister and I were regarding it with thoughtful faces, when the door opened to admit dear old Mrs. Proctor, who at once blew away the cobwebs. For she came to bear us off to a party where the world and his wife were to be, and for which our prettiest frocks, oh joy! were to be donned.

No one knows how old Mrs. Proctor is. She might be any age. She goes everywhere, knows everybody, sits up late, gets up early, and talks,—talks,—talks all the time.

When you are in the mood for it, and have time for it—which after all is *the* difficulty in rush-about London life—you simply love Mrs. Proctor's racy monologues. Of course you don't believe the half of them, but she doesn't mind that, she only cares to amuse you, and have you listening to her instead of to others. Probably she would not tell a lie for the world,—but no one thinks of her little extravagances as lies, they are only like the "Sweers" of the old Scotch woman, "Sets-aff to convairsation."

As we were driving along to the party she entertained us with tales of her youth ; and as we had some distance to go, we were grateful to her for beguiling the time.

A great July garden-party in the suburbs may be pleasant enough when the perils of the way, the heat, the dust, and the endless small, shoppy streets have been surmounted—but an hour of these does leave you limp. We were all rejoiced when at last we turned in through a huge pair of iron gates and entered a line of carriages in the shady avenue beyond.

Meantime Mrs. Proctor's tongue never ceased. She was in her element, with an audience to whom everything she told was new and I must add entertaining.

She got upon Samuel Rogers and his breakfast-parties.

At one of them she was seated on one side of the poet, while Mrs. Carlyle was on the other. As Rogers seemed in rather a glum mood, Mrs. Carlyle set herself to woo him from it ; and as she did not often thus condescend, no doubt she felt piqued by not having her efforts promptly responded to. She grew cross, and plied him with questions—a thing he particularly disliked.

At length he grew irritated beyond endurance, and turning to Mrs. Proctor, asked without any preceptible lowering of his voice, "My dear, tell me who this lady is?"

"I felt the awkwardness of it," proceeded Mrs. Proctor, "but was obliged to reply, 'Mrs. Carlyle, the wife of the historian,'"—when, as might be expected, Mrs. Carlyle looked not a little disconcerted and annoyed.

But my own turn was to come. "And now, my dear, tell me who *you* are?" said our host.

What an incorrigible man! It was his way of getting himself out of a scrape, for he knew me as well as he knew himself—but then he had to say something to avert poor Mrs. Carlyle's wrath.

She was, as everybody knew, all hot pepper at any affront, and it *was* an affront, considering that she had been led to imagine that that particular breakfast-party was given in her honour! You should have seen how the cloud lifted directly she heard the base Rogers try to take the wind out of my sails. She was all smiles for the rest of the morning.

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"I had a little passage-of-arms with Mr. Rogers soon after that," continued Mrs. Proctor, after she had looked out and ascertained that there were still a good many carriages in front, "and I think it will amuse you. I had invited him to dinner, and received in reply a most regretful negative. It ran, 'Pity me, I cannot have the pleasure of dining with you on the day you name, as I am already engaged.'"

The words, "Pity me," rather took my fancy, as they seemed to indicate a genuine vexation at having to forego my dinner-party, and I felt in the best of humours with my poet.

Accordingly, meaning to try again, I called on him, but before I could get out my invitation, in came one from the Duke of Devonshire.

"Can I go?" said Mr. Rogers to his valet, who had brought in the note.

"No, sir," replied the man; "you are engaged for that evening."

"Hum," said his master. I fancied him a little disappointed, but he rallied, and went on, "Then write and say so."

"But I am afraid, sir, I have no 'PITY ME'S' left!"

"However they arranged it, I did not feel equal to issuing another invitation on that occasion," concluded Mrs. Proctor, laughing, "and it was some time before I could risk another 'Pity Me' coming my way, I can assure you."

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We had now arrived at the front-door, and presently made our way to where a great crowd, among whom were many well-known faces, stood about and passed from room to room.

It was not a good day for an out-of-door party, as there seemed a thunderstorm impending, and there were not a few anxious glances cast sky-wards as we stepped on to a terrace, and beyond it to the lawn below, where was a marquee, etc.

A species of rostrum had been erected under a cedar tree, and rows of seats circled round it.

Here were preparations for duologues, recitations, and glee-singing.

A bowling-alley attracted its votaries in another quarter, and a couple of targets had abundance of fair Toxophilites hovering round them. Everywhere were groups of chairs, arbours, and tables of good things. Indeed, the whole was very much what one sees to-day; only the games were different.

Mrs. Proctor, who could not endure to be in the thick of things, proposed strolling about until we discovered where best to plant ourselves.

"Oh, there is 'Roy Roy' Macgregor!" she exclaimed presently, as a fine, athletic-looking man of thirty or thereabouts made his way to us across the lawn. His book, "A Thousand Miles in the Rob Roy Canoe," had not been out very long, and as his mother, Lady Macgregor, was an old friend of our mother's, we had heard a great deal about it. We had not, however, seen the canoeist himself, and it seemed a piece of luck to meet him thus.

But now the sad truth must be owned; either Mr. "Rob

Roy" Macgregor was not as pleasant *in propriâ personâ* as in the pages of his book, or he had set his heart on being pleasant to some one other than us that day.

In the latter case we forgave him, and we shrewdly suspected that it *was* the latter case; for after a while, when brilliant throngs covered the lawns, and all was gaiety and splendour, we spied stealing out of sight a tall, grey figure, very like the tall, grey figure we had met, with a slight and dainty thing, a vision in white, whom we did not know, by his side. The two hurried to a vanishing point. We looked at each other.

But we did not tell Mrs. Proctor; we "Played the game" in those days, even as you—some of you—play it now;—and it would hardly have been "The game," in our eyes to betray an honest young man who, for aught we knew, had come to a crucial moment of his life.

Of course we may have been quite wrong, quite misled by our romantic imaginations—but anyhow if there were a secret we kept it, and we never knew if when next the 'Rob Roy Canoe" wended its peaceful way among the broad, placid rivers of France, it had a second passenger.

Mrs. Proctor was now shaking hands right and left, and her acquaintances were so innumerable that I thought of a story that Mary had told me that day, which bore curiously on the point.

She was travelling and talking to a fellow-passenger, finding they were both bound for the same destination, namely, The Deanery, Canterbury.

He was a colonial, and having been born and bred in Brazil, had hardly yet grasped the range of our metropolis.

"You live in London?" he said to her with a pleased look. "Yes?" "Then you must know my friend, William King?"

Mary, however, shook her head. No, she had not the pleasure of Mr. King's acquaintance.

"Not know William King?" The eagerness on his countenance gave way to an air of mistrust. "But, excuse me, I think you *must*. For," impressively, "he lives in London, too!"

"And the case was so hopeless that I just had to leave it," said Mary. "Poor dear!"

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A certain Lady Frances Somebody-or-other sat down beside us, and seemed to be very intimate with Mrs. Proctor.

They talked confidentially over old days, laughed at their old jokes, and criticised their old friends—and at last Mrs. Proctor said, "Do, dear Lady Frances, oblige me by telling these young ladies your amusing experience of entertaining Prince Albert in the Highlands?"

"Would they care to hear it?" demurred Lady Frances, politely.

I daresay she thought it was hardly the time and place to enter upon a twice-told tale, but as we could honestly say we should, there being nothing particular doing at the moment, she played with her parasol thoughtfully and began.

"This happened a long while ago, my dears, remember that. It was while Prince Albert, as we called him then, was a comparatively young man that he offered my husband and me a visit to our Highland home; and as we had never entertained Royalty before, we wrote to inquire about the etiquette? An equerry replied that, among other things, it was correct not to speak to the Prince until he first spoke to us.

"Acting on this hint," said Lady Frances, smiling a little to herself as the scene came before her, "I sat mum as a mouse half through dinner—for though it seemed strange that the Prince should wish to come to us, and yet not trouble to open his lips when he did come, I supposed the equerry must know best. As, however, the silence grew intolerable, and as our Royal guest seemed as uneasy under it as I was, I just took the bull by the horns and began to talk as if he were an ordinary mortal. The effect was magical; he had so much to say that he could hardly say it, and was as merry as a school-boy.

"Afterwards the explanation of it all was given me. The Prince said he had been told that I was so terribly shy that he hardly liked to speak to me till I said something of my own accord. Now, wasn't that extraordinary," Lady Frances appealed to us, "when I had been expressly told that I was *not* to speak? It is the way you are still treated at the Lord Chamberlain's office, I believe," she ran on. "A niece of mine had her presence commanded at Windsor not long ago, and called in Stable Yard to inquire the etiquette on such occasions? As the husband had succeeded to his title shortly before, and she knew that the Queen does every new peeress the honour of embracing her, she made particular inquiries on that head, but you may judge if her 'Wisdom was increased' thereby.

"One official pronounced autocratically, 'It is for you to kiss Her Majesty.' Almost at the same moment, another with no less decision averred, 'Her Majesty will kiss you.'

"And these diametrically opposite opinions were given by men paid by the public to instruct inquirers on such points!" laughed Lady Frances. "Oh, my niece got on all right," continued she. "That kiss of peace was a mere *façon-de-parler*. The Queen's cheek just touched her cheek,—but stop, I did not finish my tale of our visit from Prince Albert.

"The next night he went with us to a Highland ball, and the noble hostess at whose house it was held, was very old and deaf.

"She knew, of course, that the Prince was coming, but had not heard him announced, and her ears were on the stretch for this whilst he was absolutely making his bow to her!

"As he did not move away to make room for the next comer, she felt it incumbent on her to make some remark, so, still taking him for an ordinary mortal with whom she had but a slight acquaintance, she politely and somewhat condescendingly inquired, 'I hope your wife is well?'

"'My wife!' ejaculated the Prince, involuntarily—'my —wife—?' But the truth flashing upon him, he rose to the occasion. 'Thank you, my wife is quite well,' he said, and then beat a hasty retreat to cover his amusement. The joke served him for the whole evening, and we wondered if he would tell the Queen of it afterwards?

"But I doubt his doing so," continued Lady Frances, "Her Majesty might not have appreciated it, and would very likely have discerned some negligence on the part of the poor duchess' family, who ought to have been more careful. And so of course they ought, but—" suddenly she paused, then darted from her seat. "There! The Princess is going!—" and she picked up her petticoats and flew across the lawn as lightly as a girl.

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The Princess of Wales was then in the first flush of youth and beauty. She turned and caught her old friend by the hand, so that we had a momentarily clear vision of that lovely face and winning smile—but immediately the little crowd about her closed her in, and shut her out from view.

Often as I have seen our gracious Queen Alexandra since, I always like best to think of her as she appeared against the green background of elms on that sunny July day.

There is a romance about elms; mysteriously they rustle and whisper. Their long, heavy-laden branches creak in the sultry atmosphere, and you know it is foolish to sit beneath them when they creak. You may be absent-minded, absorbed—and lo! the great branch crashes to the ground, making your heart leap. Otherwise, how still, how silent the old trees are; and how fittingly they frame a brilliant picture with a beauteous Princess for its central figure!

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Mrs. Proctor was not suffered to sit unaccosted long. A stout ambassador came bowing up, and taking the vacant seat by her side, observed that he "Had just been having a chat with Lord Beaconsfield."

"Indeed?" said she, somewhat coldly. We had seen Dizzy in the distance for some time.

"He heard you were here," continued our new friend. "And I promised to tell you that he had looked about for you in vain. He has just left—unable to stay longer."

"He always leaves early," said Mrs. Proctor.

"Public men must, my dear lady. I am making an exception to-day; it is with me a holiday. We must all have holidays sometimes. Even poor Beaconsfield—but I suspect he was going home to rest," continued he, confidentially. "He has to make a big speech to-night. But he asked me to be sure and find you, and give you his message."

After we also had left and were on our way home, Mrs. Proctor let herself go upon this.

"Lord Beaconsfield is a marvellous man," said she, drily. "It is wonderful what an amount of *blarney* he contrives to spread, or get spread by others, on these occasions. He does not talk to one half of the people he knows, but why? Because he has tried to find them, and cannot! He is quite the 'Wandering Jew'—ever seeking, and seeking in vain."

Then, having mollified herself by her satire, she shrugged her shoulders philosophically. "One must take people as one finds them. I have known Dizzy for many years now, and don't care two snaps of my fingers for his attention or inattention. I know very well that he saw me to-day, but he saw heaps of others of whom he thought more. He thought, 'I can have a gossip with Mrs. Proctor any time, but now I want to pay my court to this and that great lady, and take down in my mind her dress, and her daughter's dress, and their jewels and ornaments for my next novel.' Dizzy never neglects *business*; and besides, there is something about rank, mere bald rank, and nothing besides, that makes this curious man cringe. It must be because he never was—oh, what an old scandal-monger I am!"—and she broke off short, and could not be induced to touch that theme again.

But presently she told us about Dizzy as a young man. "Not that he was a *very* young man when I first saw him, my dears—but I have a friend, a Mr. Whitaker, who has minutely described him to me as he then was; and as you see what the great Lord Beaconsfield is like to-day, you may care to hear what Benjamin Disraeli was like once.

"Mr. Whitaker was a curate at one of the London churches, and he and his sister were asked to a party at the house of the elder Disraeli. It was soon after 'Vivian Grey' was published, which made a sensation, I can tell you.

"Its author was beginning to be courted and fêted, even then,—and one can't help remembering what an eye for effect he has always had, when one hears that he made having had to attend another party first an excuse for arriving the last of his father's guests.

"When Mr. Whitaker mentioned that, I thought '*So* like him,' nodded Mrs. Proctor, a shade maliciously.

"He turned up at last," resumed she, "dressed out fit to kill. Do you want to hear how a dandy was dressed then? He had on a puce-coloured coat, three waistcoats showing one beneath the other—red, blue, and white—

and puce knee-breeches, with white silk stockings. This, with his dark hair and clear olive skin was no doubt very becoming, as well as being the height of the fashion.

"The odd thing was that a young curate who was by no means a frequenter of fashionable haunts, should have thought it worth noting. He would have been more likely to pass over such foppery with contempt; and when I said to him something of the kind," proceeded Mrs. Proctor, "he agreed at once, but had his excuse ready. 'Ah, Mrs. Proctor, I *could* not despise Dizzy—no one could.'"

CHAPTER X.

An agreeable invitation clashes with a "Monday Pop"—To the wall with the "Pop"—Mrs. Millais looked like a little Dresden shepherdess—Mr. Lehmann has heard of "Cooking accounts" before!—Various versions of a nursery rhyme—Miss Thackeray tells of a students' love affair in which her father and Norman Macleod were rivals—"Ich liebe Mélanie doch!"—A judge and a Q.C. spar about saving syllables—The problem of Mr. Samuel Warren's wig—Sir Charles and Lady Dilke—The former chaffed about Mormons by Mr. Wilkie Collins.

One morning Mary looked up from her letters at breakfast-time with one in her hand,—"Dear me, this *is* tiresome. I do so love my 'Monday Pops,' and if this had been an ordinary invitation, I should have refused it straight away—but it is from the Leslie Stephens, and Miss Thackeray is to be there."

"Of course you'll go," said her husband. "You have wanted for long to meet Miss Thackeray; and into the bargain, there will be other people of the kind you like. As for the 'Pops,' you can get them at any time."

The Monday Popular Concerts were a feature of London life at this period. As to their musical merits, I can be no judge, but presume they must have been considerable, since Monday after Monday there were found sitting in their own seats weary men and blasée women, whose wealth and social status would have opened to them any doors.

On "Pop" nights the audience in St. James' Hall had something of the appearance of a family gathering, so many of those present knew each other—while many more knew each other by sight—and quietly listening, took no interest in the dress and appearance of the rest, but surrendered themselves wholly to the restful pleasure for which they had come.

Anything more unlike an opera or theatre audience it would have been difficult to imagine; and as hours were early, smart dressing unnecessary, and there was no worry about getting away at the close, Mary would often perform her most arduous social and charitable duties on a Monday, in serene anticipation of a calm and peaceful evening.

"Well, there is no help for it," said she, now. "The dear things might have known better than to clash with my 'Pop'—but the 'Pop' must go to the wall. You girls shall go to it however, and you shall *both* go to it this time, so it's an ill wind, etc."

Accordingly when Monday evening came, we dropped the diners-out and were conveyed on to St. James' Hall. Luckily, the hours suited.

But we had nothing to say about our concert the next morning, except the usual declaration that we had enjoyed ourselves, whereas Mary was bubbling over with reminiscences.

"First of all," we said, "tell us about Miss Thackeray. I don't care much about Mrs. Leslie Stephen; people are never so interesting once they are married," cried one of our foolish selves—"And besides, *she* hasn't written 'Old Kensington,'" cried the other.

"Oh, but she is very nice indeed," said Mary. "Shy, and gentle, and very quiet—and though I don't say she has the charm of her sister—"

"Tell us about Miss Thackeray—tell us about Miss Thackeray."

"Do you want to know what she is like—or—?"

"What she is like, of course—and all the rest too."

"She has the sweetest face in the world. Perhaps not strictly speaking—"

"Is she pretty?"

"Not what some people would call—"

"Why, I have heard she *is* pretty."

Poor Mary could hardly get in a word for us and our interruptions, but eventually we learned that the goddess at whose feet we would fain have worshipped—(thousands of other girls felt the same—) had smooth, brown hair, expressive, brown eyes, and a little flickering pink in her cheeks, which always looked as if it might flicker out at any moment, but somehow did just manage to hold out.

"Was she pleasant to talk to?"

"More than pleasant, fascinating. There was something quite irresistible in her smile."

"And her dress?"

"Ah, there you have me on the hip!" quoth Mary, laughing. "I can't tell you one single thing about her dress. But look here," she ran on eagerly, "I can tell you about Mrs. Millais' dress—"

"Were the Millais' there?"

"Very much there; he in great form about his new picture, and she looking a perfect little Watteau shepherdess! Don't hurry me, and I will describe her inch by inch. The *motif* of the dress was white silk, barred with tiny satin stripes of shell-pink. The whole front breadth was pink of the same lovely shade, under old Venetian lace ten inches wide. The bodice was cut square; and the sleeves, which were tight to the elbow, hung loose below it. There now; could Madame Elise herself have given you a better description?"

As we never aspired to have any dealings with the great Elise we could not judge of her descriptive powers, but certainly Mrs. Millais' Watteau-like dress stood out distinctly to view beneath Mary's graphic touches.

Mrs. Millais was not a very interesting person however, and we inquired about the rest of the company? The names I remember were the Russell Gurneys, the Lehmanns, Mr. Spring Rice, and a Mr. Venables. (Of the latter it may be said that his chief claim to notice consisted in his having been the boy who broke Thackeray's nose in a fight when they were at Charterhouse together.)

"It was only a small party then?"

"Oh, quite small, and a funny thing happened at dessert. Mr. Lehmann was admiring some beautiful old covered dishes on the table, and as one was within reach of him, and he wanted to examine it more closely, he put out his hand and took the cover off. Lo, and behold, the dish was full of bills! Mrs. Stephen, half-laughing, half-disconcerted, protested that such china was only meant to be looked at, not handled; at which the perpetrator of the outrage laughed back and replied, 'I have often heard of *cooking accounts*, Minnie, but never before of serving them up at table!'"

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During dinner, Mary said, there was a good deal of general conversation, and it turned at one time on the trial going on between Miss Saurin and some nuns.

What the nuns and Miss Saurin were at loggerheads about, I forget, but the trial was on everybody's lips at the moment—and at the Leslie Stephens' dinner-party some one remarked on one of the barristers quoting the nursery rhyme, "The Queen was in the parlour, eating bread and honey," and said that he had not got it right. At least, that was not as he, the speaker, had been taught the rhyme in his nursery days.

On this, the Recorder of London declared that the version he knew was, "The Queen was in her *kitchen*—" and a Scotch lady interposed with a Scotch version,—so that no two people seemed to think alike on the subject. However, all agreed that the last line ran,

> "By came a little blackbird, and pecked off her nose,"

except Miss Thackeray, who declared that *her* ending was,

> "A doctor passing by heard a horrid cry of pain,
> He picked up the piece of nose, and sewed it on again."

Whereat everyone called out that this was her own impromptu, but she protested she never wrote poetry.

I wonder if my sister and I here showed by our countenances that we were rather astonished at such trivialities amusing our solemn elders, for Mary, while affecting to take no notice, threw out, "Tired and hard-worked people are sometimes so thankful for a little nonsense. Especially at the end of the day. It is the unbending of the bow. I have often watched a poor man regularly shivering under the attacks of a clever woman bent on making him talk cleverly; and a child who comes and puts her hand upon his knee, and talks to him about her pussy-cat, is like a cool breath in the desert to him."

"What else did you talk about?" said we, after a pause.

"What else? Oh, the speech Mr. Stephen's brother made the night before in the House of Commons. Both the sisters were there, and it must have been a great speech, for though it lasted two hours, Miss Thackeray said enthusiastically, 'I am sure we could have listened for another two hours; couldn't we, Minnie?'"

Mrs. Stephen however heaved a gentle sigh. "No; I couldn't. I was glad when it was over, Annie; I am glad when everything is over!"

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Shortly after this, Miss Thackeray came to see us one quiet afternoon, and looking at a photograph of Norman Macleod, (the same that he himself objected to, and for which he wanted to substitute that of his brother George) she said, "Oh, do you know 'Norman'?"

There was, of course, an outburst of assent, and then we waited for more. More was so obviously hovering on her lips, and her eyes looked so full of laughing intelligence, that to let her keep it, whatever it was, to herself, was not to be thought of.

Good-humouredly she began: "My father and 'Norman' were students together at Weimar, in the long, long ago; and fell in love with the same mädchen, the daughter of one of the professors there.

"Her mother was French, and she was called Mélanie. No doubt she had big blue eyes, and a flaxen plait of hair hanging down her back, and they thought her a lovely creature. They talked so freely about this Mélanie afterwards, (I don't suppose any hearts were broken,) that when I happened to meet 'Norman' some years ago, I teased him and he took it merrily, and what was more, told me the end of the story.

"Finding himself in Weimar one summer, his evil genius prompted him to try and discover what had become of this 'darling Mélanie,' and if she were alive, where she lived.

"He knew that she had married, and married a Court official, so would be easily traced—as she was.

"She lived with her husband at the Palace; and when told that the Gnädige Frau was at home, he felt quite pleasantly excited having in his mind's eye the Mélanie of thirty years before—and was impatient for the door to open.

"After a considerable time it did open, but oh, the shock! An exclamation all but escaped,—however, he controlled himself and inquired in faint, weak, wavering accents, 'Are you my old friend Mélanie?'

"Why, yes; of course she was. Grossly stout, red-faced, and coarse-featured as was the full-blown dame before him, she was plainly alive to the tremulous incredulity of his tone, and mortified by it. 'Ich bin Mélanie; ja wohl,' she said—and looked at him with something of his own dismay. He thought she was bewildered and irritated by the change in him; and that in some curious way it opened her eyes to the change in herself.

"At all events, the visit was a failure, and completely shattered 'Norman's' youthful illusions.

"But he said nothing about it to my father," continued Miss Thackeray, "and when my father, not long before his death, was lecturing in Edinburgh on the 'Four Georges,' he espied the great Scotch preacher seated on the platform, in the front row, before which he was about to pass.

"As by a lightning flash, he saw before him the comrade of his youth, the old German town, the professor's little fair-haired daughter—and as he passed 'Norman,' he laid a hand upon his shoulder, and the eyes of the two giants met.

"'*Ich liebe Mélanie doch*,' whispered my father, in deep, gutteral German, and without changing a muscle of his countenance, passed to his seat.

"'But I had the best of it, for I *could* laugh,' said 'Norman.'"

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There was another trial, and a trial of still greater public interest than that of Miss Saurin and her nuns, going on soon after this, and the first question one and another asked directly they met each other was, "What do you think about the 'Claimant?'"—the 'Claimant' being of course the Arthur Orton who impersonated Sir Roger Tichborne, and laid claim to the baronetcy and estates.

As many people as not were convinced that he was what he pretended to be; and I remember being much struck with the quiet remark of Mr. Herschell, who, being a leading Q.C., might be supposed to hold decided views on the case. All he would say was, "I really don't know what to think." And this when every cock-sure young man and feather-pated girl would exclaim on the instant, "*Of course* he is Tichborne," or "*Of course* he is not!"

As the trial proceeded, opinions indeed did begin to waver, there seemed so very much to be said on both sides. Mr. Wilkie Collins, for instance, came in one day and said, "As to this 'Claimant's' forgetting what he learned at school, I cannot say that *that* is in any way remarkable, for I have undergone a like experience. Although I have been for twenty years before the public as a literary man, I still make the most absurd mistakes in spelling, and my grammar is sometimes awful. I assure you the printers have to correct my grammar. I am in favour of the 'Claimant's' being the man."

Others present loudly combated the idea, but as I forget who these were and what was said, I will confine myself to relating the neat epigram made by Lord Chelmsford when the great trial was over; as although it was bruited about at the time, it may be new to some people in these days.

In order to catch its full point I must premise that "Baxter," "Rose," and "Norton" were the names of the three principal lawyers engaged in the case on the "Claimant's" side.

Lord Chelmsford's witty lines rans thus:

"'Tis said by Baxter, Rose, and Norton,
The 'Claimant' is not Arthur Orton—
They can't deny, what's more important,
That Arthur's done what Arthur oughtn't."

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Whenever Mr. Herschell came to see us, we always had some good stories of the Law Courts.

He loved to tell, and we to hear them. They were always funny and never malicious. I think I never knew any man who so systematically spoke well of people behind their backs—but if he had merely to recount some little foible on the one part or some piquant snub on the other, he would do it with spirit.

One day he had a brisk passage-of-arms to relate between Lord Campbell on the Bench and Mr. Hawkins down below.

Mr. Hawkins was conducting a case of dispute between the proprietors of an omnibus, and the owner of a brougham, which had come into collision. Apparently the learned counsel was not aware of the correct pronunciation of that kind of carriage, for he repeatedly referred to it as a "*Brough-am*," rolling out the full length of the word.

Fidgetting in his seat, at length Lord Campbell said testily, "Mr. Hawkins, if you will call the vehicle in question a *Broom*, you will save a syllable and be better understood."

Of course Mr. Hawkins could but bow acquiescence, but he bided his time, and presently the time came.

Lord Campbell, continuing his interrogations, spoke of the "Omnibus." In an instant Mr. Hawkins was on his feet. "My Lord, if you will call the vehicle in question a *Bus*, you will save *two* syllables, and be better understood."

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Finding this well received, Mr. Herschell treated us to another smart reply, although in this instance it had not been called forth by the spirit of revenge.

An Irish barrister had been bored to death by a wearisome old Judge for whom he had no great respect, and was obviously paying but little attention as the other maundered on. Suddenly the old gentleman perceived this, and demanded, "Do you follow me?"

"Really, my Lord, I can't go yelping after every hare you start," replied the impudent barrister.

It *was* very impudent, but after all, if, as Father O'Flynn asserts, "One may be a priest and an Irishman, too"; for "Priest" read "Lawyer," and let the plea stand.

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A Q.C. who can be very agreeable when he chooses, but does not always choose, is Mr. Samuel Warren, (the author of "Ten Thousand a Year"), and he took Mary in to dinner one night.

He talked pleasantly enough, and told her one anecdote about himself which she thought worth remembering for us at home.

His books being much read in America, he is not unaccustomed to receiving visits from American admirers, but he had had one lately which gave rise to some amusement, as much to his visitor as to himself.

The stranger, after the usual opening sentences, looked at Mr. Warren and said, "You seem to have an excellent wig. I should never have guessed it was not your own hair."

"But it *is* my own hair," retorted Mr. Warren. "I have to wear a wig in the Law Courts, but, thank goodness, I can take it off the instant I am out of them."

"Is that so?" rejoined the American, with a humorous look in his eye; "do you say that it is your own hair you wear? But I know better."

"How know better?"

"I know that you are as bald as a badger."

Whereat Mr. Warren jumped to his feet and invited the sceptic to pull his hair.

This done, and his bushy crop thoroughly investigated, peace was restored between them and the mystery cleared up. "I have your photograph here," said the American, feeling in his breast-pocket, "I cut it out of my copy of your immortal work, and brought it along in the hope of being able to compare it with yourself. To tell the truth, I have not considered the likeness glaring"; and to the astonishment of Mr. Warren, he produced a portrait of—that gentleman's father!

By some mistake, this had been prefixed to the American edition of "Ten Thousand a Year," and as it was distinctly stated to be a "Portrait of the Author" it was natural to suppose that it was so.

"And my father *is* as bald as a badger," wound up Mr. Warren, laughing.

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Everyone who came to the house at this time was full of the General Election, which was going on all over England, and Lady Dilke gave us an account of an amusing experience she had during her husband, Sir Charles' canvass.

Sir Charles, a Radical of Radicals, was opposed by a certain Mr. Gordon, an equally Ultra-Conservative, and the combat was fierce.

It was also, I believe, a very near thing, and every art was practised by the two well-matched opponents.

Lady Dilke said that she was nearly worn out with driving about in the heat, inviting and imploring people to vote for Sir Charles. She often started at eight in the morning, and had not completed her round by eight at night.

When interviewing voters and their wives, she spoke to them with a sort of friendly familiarity which she was told went down with people of the shopkeeping class, and after chatting about this thing and that, finally asked in a careless way if they would vote for her husband?

Many said they would, and she went home one day triumphantly, only to discover on stepping out of her carriage a huge blue poster affixed to its back, bearing the inscription "Vote for Gordon!"

So then it was quite in the cards that the constituents whose vote that day had been begged for her "husband" had promised them to Mr. Gordon!

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Before she left, Lady Dilke told us of a witty saying by the celebrated Quaker, John Bright. Dizzy had remarked to Bright that Gladstone's was "A very harassing legislation."

"If you had been with the children of Israel in the wilderness," retorted Bright, "you would probably have called the Ten Commandments 'A very harassing legislation.'"

Bright's marvellous ready retorts were much in people's mouths at that time.

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Shortly after this, the Dilkes came to dinner, and we had an opportunity of seeing whether the constituents so enigmatically treated by the wife had the best or the worst of it when they brought the husband in as their member.

At least that was how we women who were no politicians looked at it. We felt like Mrs. Oliphant's "Miss Marjoribanks," who carried everything before her at an election by pronouncing with inimitable solemnity that her candidate was "*The* man for Carlingford." His opinions, his convictions, mattered not at all. He was simply *the* man for them—and they returned him. It is a truthful touch.

But although Sir Charles Dilke was returned, I cannot for my life imagine that it could have been because he was felt to be "*The* man" for the seat, wherever it was.

He must have got hold of his constituents by other means, for he was not charming. In fact he was uncommonly dull, and a dull *young* man is much less endurable than a dull *old* one.

As our poor bore did not care for the general conversation, which was good—Mr. Wilkie Collins, Sir Edwin Landseer, and other pleasant people being there—we had to take it by turns to amuse him, and luckily Mary had read his book, "Greater Britain," which woke him up to some show of interest. But she owned she could hardly keep hers alive, till Mr. Collins took compassion on her, and tried to introduce a lighter tone into the conversation.

He began by asking Sir Charles if he thought there were an opening for a "London Correspondent" in any of the papers of the Far West, as he would apply for the post if there were?

Sir Charles, taking him seriously, gave the matter consideration before he replied in solemn accents, "The difficulty would be, you see, that they might want to pay in kind."

"What, in *vegetables*?" cried the other, in affected horror. "Oh, I say, they would be rotten before they could possibly reach me! No, no," shaking his head, "I could not agree to that. I really could not take vegetables instead of money."

Sir Charles, seeing he was in fun, tried to smile but soon changing the subject, began another. He was so full of his "Greater Britain" that he could think of nothing else, and of course in a sense he was interesting to listen to, but far more so when Mr. Collins took him in hand, than in monologue. His monologues were tiresome to a degree ;—one, Mary said, lasted ten minutes by the clock,—and he could not hold his audience with Mr. Collins continually breaking in with a brisk question or comment which broke the thread.

Sir Charles was dilating on his favourite theme—(we heard afterwards that it was so)—of Salt Lake City, and the Mormon women. He seemed to think he had reached the hearts of them and learned their true sentiments.

"Do you really think so, Sir Charles?"—said Mr. Collins. "Don't you think that it is more likely they were told about your coming beforehand, and instructed by their lords what they were to do? I imagine that Brigham Young is too knowing a bird to let his hens cackle without his leave. Depend upon it, he collected them round him and admonished them with an awful countenance. 'Ye wives of mine, give ear. A man from London is coming to write a book about us. Give him a pleasant impression, or—it will be the worse for you. The prophet has said it.'"

Perceiving, however, that this very mild chaff was not to the taste of the *Chaffee*, our genial novelist desisted and adroitly turned the conversation into other channels.

We left them discussing Siberia, for which Sir Charles was going to start at the earliest opportunity,—and although we felt sure that Mr. Collins could have been equally funny concerning the experiences likely to befal the worthy baronet in collecting material there for the obviously impending book, he restrained himself.

"What tempted me was the appalling self-confidence of that very young man!" he said, afterwards.

CHAPTER XI.

A mysterious being who was a mystery even to himself—Mr. Laurence Oliphant has something uncanny in his appearance—But possesses a wonderful fascination—The old man's misadventure in Westminster Abbey tickles his fancy—He relates tales of different communities—I meet George Eliot at Mr. John Blackwood's, in Edinburgh—She reminds me of a *horse*—At a second meeting, hear about her "At Home" days—Mr. Froude is not to be deterred from proclaiming his contempt for George Eliot's works by the proximity of Mr. Cross—"That good Cross just went on eating his dinner!"

About this time, luck sent our way that strange, brilliant, mysterious being, Laurence Oliphant.

Perhaps of all the people I met during my periodical visits to "Victorian London," Mr. Laurence Oliphant impressed me the most deeply.

He seemed to be not *one* man, but many kinds of men at once. He was a contradiction to himself. Sometimes all on fire, a very flame of enthusiasm for some object, often a fanciful one,—again equally ardent in pursuit of another, with the first quite forgotten.

You never knew what mood he would be in—but of one thing you could be certain, that whatever it was, he would not be in it long.

If he came to you depressed, dejected, seething with evil prognostications, bent beneath a weight of gloom too heavy to be borne—he went away laughing like a boy. If, on the contrary, his fine countenance showed itself unclouded at the start, a shadow might fall at any moment.

And the shadow was never very far away; there was always something in the dark and rather wild eyes that warned of its proximity. They endorsed, in effect, the following passage, transcribed by me into an old-fashioned note-book about this time, with reference, I cannot but think, to him.

"Behind every scale in music, the gayest, the grandest, the most triumphant, lies its dark relative minor; our brightest hours are tunes that have a modulation into those dreary keys ever possible."

And is it not a fact that this "dark relative minor" lending its soft melancholy to a fine countenance, does heighten its attractiveness? Which of you does not know this? Oh, I have no need to enlarge.

Mr. Laurence Oliphant possessed the sombre eye, the reluctant smile, to perfection. Did he know it? No, I really don't think he did. He was a mystery to himself.

And he was quite natural; even in his wildest rhodomontades he was not *posing*, he was not putting on anything that was not there. He felt all that he said—and a little more. In fact, it may be surmised that he did not quite know what he did feel.

After the lapse of years, when this wonderful personality, at once so strong and so weak, has long been in his quiet grave, there can be no harm in saying that even before he committed his crowning piece of folly, the subjection of his great soul to one so little fitted to master it, there was something *uncanny* in the man. Nothing he said, or did, or became, would have surprised those who knew him.

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On the occasion of our first meeting, he was all traveller. He had just returned from America, and everyone knew what he had been doing there, but he did not in any way allude to it. For the moment he had escaped from leading-strings, and the rebound was commensurate.

He poured forth experiences of one continent and another, and confined himself to the veriest chit-chat.

Sometimes his voice rose high; that was when he had a fraud, or a trick to expose,—but evidently he recognised that a London drawing-room, full of mere acquaintances, was not the place for revelations or demonstrations, and if these lay near his lips, they were checked. Of the fanatic to whom he had delivered himself, body and soul, for the time being, he said not a word.

Of course we were wondering if he would; and once or twice felt as though he were drawing near the "Danger" point, but he never touched it—he seemed as if he had resolved beforehand not to touch it;—and I fancy that Mary was secretly thankful for this, even if some of us were not.

Mary had known his father, Sir Anthony Oliphant, in her youth, and had been told by him that he and his son were the only civilians present at the taking of Sebastopol—at least, Mary maintained this. How it could have been, she did not pretend to understand, but was positive she had heard old Sir Anthony say so.

Another of his statements, she alleged, was that "Laurence had supported himself entirely by literature, ever since he was eighteen years old." This was also unsupported by evidence, but we gulped it down.

Indeed we would have believed anything; and an acquaintance coming in, and assuring us that in pursuance of the dictates of the head of the "Brotherhood," Harris, this gifted Laurence Oliphant whom London, Paris, and every capital in the civilised world would have been delighted to honour, was actually seen selling strawberries at a railway-station in the New World!

You never knew what would amuse Mr. Oliphant, and what would not. Some really witty anecdotes told in his presence fell as flat as pancakes, while he simply rocked with laughter over a funny little incident that had happened to some of our party the previous Sunday, at Westminster Abbey.

During the singing of a hymn at the evening service, a little old man in front of us dropped his slip of paper on which the hymns were printed, and dived after it. But the sheet had disappeared—floated off out of ken—so was not to be retrieved; and the little old man remained grovelling.

As he did not reappear on the surface, Mary's husband in the kindness of his heart took alarm, (he said afterwards that he thought the poor little man had fallen down in a fit,) dived after him, seized him by the scruff of the neck, and proceeded to lug him along the floor into the open. The unfortunate victim of this misplaced aid was too much amazed for resistance.

Then another well-meaning stranger came also to the rescue, and between them they hauled their patient on to his feet—his collar bursting in the process—and it was only then, when hands were fumbling at his throat, that he recovered himself sufficiently to expostulate. The rest of us, who understood, could do nothing,—but that meek little old man must have had a spirit of his own, for he buttoned his collar, resumed his place, and albeit somewhat flushed, stood out the rest of the service.

This sounds nothing in the telling, but Mr. Oliphant saw the absurdity of it so keenly that, as I said, he laughed and laughed.

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It was a wonderful thing to listen to Mr. Oliphant when he was in the full rush of a *raconteur*. He seemed to be in very truth seeing the sights he described, and hearing the sounds. Surely never man had a more extraordinary and diverse career,—he seemed to have done, seen, and lived through a dozen existences,—but it is all so jumbled up in my head by this time that I can only recal—and that faintly—scraps that do not in the least hang together.

One however does stand out to view more distinct in outline. It was that of a tour among convents in Moldavia, undertaken at the instance of a nun, whom he had met one night at the opera, of all places!

The nun, a very friendly nun indeed, assured him of a welcome and hospitality wherever he went, and he found that she knew what she was talking about. From convent to convent he made a sort of Royal Progress, and everywhere was received with open arms.

And it was pleasant to hear his report of that curious, and, as we should call it, terribly back-of-beyond place. Apparently neither the nuns nor the monks of Moldavia found it so, and considered that they had as many of the good things of this world as other people.

Many of them were not immured within convent or monastery walls. Such as chose could "Live out." They formed themselves into small communities, dwelling in cottages with gardens and orchards, which they cultivated with excellent effect. And as the climate was delightful, Mr. Oliphant declared that he could not imagine a more attractive and altogether satisfactory existence.

As he spoke, it was clear that he had an *arrière pensée* on the subject. He dwelt so fondly on it, and returned so often to it, that some one said after he had gone, "Take my word for it, Laurence Oliphant is contemplating a retreat for himself of this kind, one day";—a prediction which was justified, as we all know.

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Could any two people have been less like each other, than the genius above mentioned, and another genius who was now for a brief space to occupy our minds, namely, "George Eliot"?

We never knew her intimately, few people did,—(partly of course owing to the unfortunate circumstances of her life)—but in 1876, in which year I first met her, at the house of Mr. John Blackwood, in Edinburgh, she was going a little more into society.

By this time I was married, and had written my first novel, "Mr. Smith," and this had brought me the friendship of the editor of "Maga," and the honour of being asked, "In a quiet way," to meet the author of "Adam Bede."

Much did I look forward to that evening—but, shall I confess it?—it ended in disappointment. As such evenings have a trick of doing, it proved barren of any real enjoyment.

George Eliot, with her large head, and rather *horse-like* face and portentous manner, was not to me an attractive personage, and when next I went to stay with Mary in London, she rated me for this.

What fault had I to find? What cause had I to dislike the famous novelist, one of the first, if not the first literary celebrity of her day?

Well, what cause? Can one always give a cause? Was not the immortal Dr. Fell the victim of a prejudice?

I had been set down beside the guest of the evening at her request—(Mr. Blackwood said it was at her request)—and she had meant to be civil and kind. But how heavily drave the wheels of her chariot! How interminably dragged that interview!

Could it be possible that this was the creator of "Mrs. Poyser," and "Hetty"? "Dinah," yes; and "Adam Bede," and "Maggie Tulliver," and any number more of serious, thoughtful people—I could picture the heavy brow bent in weighty cogitation over such,—but little frivolous, selfish Hetty?

And what perplexed me more than all the rest was the thought of "Mr. Gilfil's Love-story"—that simple story, with its exquisite insight into the human heart. How *could* that ponderous being—"Oh! don't call her that!" cried out Mary, in real pain.

So of course I tried to explain away an absurd resentment, and said no more about it.

Mary had not herself entered into the delicate atmosphere of "Mr. Gilfil's Love-story"; its touches, so marvellously true to nature, had been by her passed unnoticed. It was not in her to be moved by the picture of the perfidious Anthony's cameo-like profile reposing on his pillow in the moonlight, nor by that of the poor little "Pet monkey's" jealous watch whilst he made love to her triumphant rival.

No; Mary had read the "Scenes of Clerical Life," but owned that she had not been greatly impressed by them, and I found that what disappointed and repelled me in George Eliot's personality was to her incomprehensible.

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She was soon to form her own opinion of the talented authoress however, for as it chanced we came into contact with her shortly afterwards. She had been lured to an evening party by an irresistible bait, the playing of Rubinstein.

Rubinstein was the lion of the musical world at the moment, and when we arrived at the party, to find him already there, he was the cynosure of all eyes.

"What do you think?" "Like the portraits of Beethoven?" "Yes—No,"—a little buzz was going on in the background. "He is said to cultivate the resemblance sedulously,"—the gossip went.

But how can a resemblance be "Cultivated"?

A face is a face; and a shaggy mane of hair is a shaggy mane; and the face can't be altered, and the mane can't be altered—in the way suggested;—and as for Herr Rubinstein's coat and collar, it was like every other coat and collar affected by his craft ; and—really I could not see what the poor man was supposed to have "Sedulously" done? He had a *scowl* certainly—perhaps he cultivated the *scowl*?

His playing was glorious, and among the rest George Eliot gave herself up to it entirely.

That it cast a spell over her was obvious. Her massive brow unbent, and a softened expression stole over her heavy features. She did not look the same woman as when last I saw her.

Music, it was said, always had on her a great effect. "Indeed, she is a real lover of it," said Mr. Lehmann, sitting down beside us in an interval. "The pity is, that she rather prides herself on being a performer too, as I know to my cost. I play duets with her sometimes. Well, they are odd performances, those duets. She has feeling, certainly she has feeling—but her execution is—erratic ;"—and he laughed a little. "However," he continued, "it gives pleasure to one auditor at any rate, for whenever we get through a whole page without a breakdown, Lewis claps his hands and cries 'Exquisite!'"

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When Rubinstein had departed, and we could all walk and talk again, a friend of Mary's gave us an account of George Eliot's days "At Home," and what went on then,—and her narrative derived an additional relish from being illustrated as it were by the novelist's remarkable figure being within a few yards of the speaker.

Let me pause to describe it.

If George Eliot's countenance shewed itself more noble and striking on this occasion than I had thought it hitherto, so did she also appear to greater advantage in other respects. Possibly she had not considered Mr. Blackwood's dinner-party worth her best bib and tucker? Possibly she may not have had it with her? She was only going to Auld

Reekie, and she may have surmised that people were not smart in Auld Reekie?

Now of course if the gifted lady *did* thus think, she was very much out in her reckoning. In no place is dress more considered—or was in those days,—and ladies there would have thought shame to wear the dirty gloves and frayed trimmings they smuggled into London drawing-rooms, "Where there will be such a crush, my dear, that it will never be seen *what* you put on."

Be that as it may, the famous authoress had now arrayed herself in a very fine gown indeed, and looked exceedingly well in it.

As far as I remember, it was a rich silk of pale heliotrope colour, made high—(though bare necks were even then *de rigueur*)—and a quantity of soft old lace was disposed upon the bodice and sleeves. A cap of the same old lace—probably Mechlin—had strips of heliotrope ribbon artfully inserted to take off the *cappy* look,—and in short, the whole get-up was effective and becoming. Having studied it, we came to the conclusion that its wearer was an imposing and majestic, if not precisely a handsome woman. The resemblance to a *horse* was still there, but modified.

So now we were in a position to appreciate the histrionic powers of our friend's friend, who had been so obliging as to take notes of what transpired when votaries flocked to see George Eliot on the domestic pedestal, albeit these filtered to us through a third person.

We were informed that the priestess sat enthroned within an alcove at the end of a long drawing-room, and that arrivals were received by Mr. Lewis in a small antechamber. Here they were detained by him for the space of about ten minutes, presumably to let their predecessors have their due before their own introduction on the scene.

Mr. Lewis, said the friend's friend, always worked loyally to make this period of probation pass without its occasioning too much impatience. Mr. Lewis could not, of course, enter into any real conversation, as he had to be on the stretch all the time to see that no one on in front exceeded his or her limit,—besides, new-comers sometimes came so thick and fast that he was hard put to it to regulate the traffic. Still, he managed wonderfully. Sometimes he got them to talk to one another.

Obviously the friend's friend thought this an achievement worth recording,—and although it raised a secret smile at the time, from my present wider experience, upon my word, I think she was right. How many a poor hostess gnashes her teeth in vain, while stolid faces sit round, all steadily set one way, all looking for bread to her alone!

When at last the Gentleman Usher, (for that, said our friend's friend, is our name for George Lewis,) is released from his post, it is to join the group assembled within the presence-chamber, though he still obliterates himself as much as possible. At one time he was a brilliant talker —none better in London—but since his union with George Eliot, it is his pleasure to merge all his attainments in hers, and to be only one of the humblest of her votaries.

We felt by this time that we had had enough of the subject (and perhaps of the friend and the friend's friend) for Mary here rose abruptly from her chair, and we slipped away.

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Mrs. Kemble, (Fanny Kemble,) also gave us a glimpse into the life of George Eliot, which in a sense seemed to account for the oppressive solemnity of her companionship.

She was never at play. She never, as it were, laid herself aside. Her great mind was ever working, receiving, digesting, reproducing. "The only recreation in any form that commended itself to her," said Mrs. Kemble, "was a change of subject for thought and talk."

"Was not this a little tiring for those about her?" queried Mary. "People who are always on the high horse do wear one out, you know."

"Oh, they do," assented Mrs. Kemble, readily. "They wear *me* out—I know that. After a day at the Lewises I am worn to a thread."

"But perhaps," said Mary, with a happy thought, "though our genius may not permit herself to be seen or heard recreating, she recreates in a corner all by herself, like Lord Dundreary's bird?"

"Like Lord Dundreary's bird? Oh, I know what you mean," and Mrs. Kemble laughed, for everyone was flying to see Sothern in "Lord Dundreary" at this time. (As Mary did not go to theatres, I had remembered what I could of the famous dandy for her benefit.)

"You mean, when Lord Dundreary pooh-poohs the proverb 'Birds of a feather flock together'—and says, 'Of course they do, don't you know? How can a bird flock in a corner all by itself?'"

So then we fell to talking about the play, and no more was said of George Eliot.

But after Mrs. Kemble had betaken herself to her carriage, I said to Mary, "She knew nothing of the 'Erratic' duets, and the adoring auditor."

"To be sure; why did you not think of that?" replied she.

But when a speaker holds the house and is *the* authority on the topic of the hour, I know better than to contribute even a mite of information. Solid ignorance is best.

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Yet one word more of this great genius, though it is not fitly in place here.

But then, where would it be in place?—it is such a little thing—anyhow, here it is. George Eliot was dead, had been dead some time, when Mary was dining out one night, and found herself placed at table between Mr. Froude, and Mr. Vernon Lushington. Directly opposite sat George Eliot's widower, Mr. Cross.

Dinner had scarcely begun when Mr. Froude, probably instigated by the sight of Mr. Cross, started talking of the defunct authoress, and addressing his neighbour in his loud voice, a voice he never modulated for anybody, said, "I like 'Middlemarch' and the 'Scenes of Clerical life,' but I don't care for the rest of George Eliot's books. I think they are greatly overrated."

He took a few mouthfuls of soup, and began again; "George Eliot"—

"Heavens! What will he say next?" cried Mary to herself, and looked across the table in trepidation—but as Mr. Cross was sitting placidly silent, she might yet be in time. She felt that further communications must be checked somehow.

"George Eliot"—again began her neighbour. Hastily leaning towards him, and lowering her own voice, Mary murmured confidentially: "Is not that Mr. Cross sitting opposite?"

Vain effort. "Yes, that's Cross,—and as I was saying," continued the strident voice, wholly unabashed, "I like 'Middlemarch' and the 'Scenes of Clerical life,' but as for the rest of George Eliot's books, I don't care twopence for any one of 'em!"

It was out. He had done his worst, and poor Mary felt that the room was spinning round with her. "But, do you know," she told me afterwards, "that good Cross just went on eating his dinner."

CHAPTER XII.

Lady Claud Hamilton's tea, where Oscar Wilde is vaunted by his disciples—Lady Claud does not think she need have been "Glared at"—A terrible girl would like to send a venerable old lady's harmless inquiry to "*Punch*"—Oscar Wilde's almond tree—"I almost prefer it to a tenor voice"—His idea of a useful wedding-present—"Say you love me, Fanny darling?"—Mr. Val Princep tells of a machine-made lady, whose legs went off with a "Whizz!"—Bishop Colenso and a séance—A mistake between a policeman and Sir Edwin Landseer.

By the time at which we have now arrived, I had been married some years,—but as my husband and I had a London house within easy distance of Mary, and as we met every day, and did almost everything together, my memories can flow evenly on—and indeed a good deal that has been already described took place under these auspices. My beloved sister-friend and I were inseparable both in London and out of it, for towards the close of her life, when widowed, she joined us in taking Scotch houses for the autumn, and later, was more frequently beneath our roof in our Essex home, than away from it.

This explanation will serve to show how we continued to meet the same friends, and join in the same social gatherings as before. Let me now proceed.

We went one day to tea with Lady Claud Hamilton, and in came Mrs. Spottiswoode, the wife of the President of the Royal Society, with her two little boys. She said, "I have only a minute to stay, as I am on the way to Oscar Wilde's, to meet Mrs. Langtry and several other professional beauties."

Dr. Tyndall, who was present, looked a little surprised at the name "Oscar Wilde" spoken without the prefix "Mr.," and asked "Who is Oscar Wilde?"

But his astonishment was nothing to that of the lady. She drew herself up, and with a withering emphasis, answered shortly, "Oscar Wilde is a poet."

"A poet, is he? What has he written?" demanded he, very naturally,—and indeed, it was a question several of us were putting to ourselves, so that with one accord we turned to Mrs. Spottiswoode to answer it.

Possibly she found it just a shade embarrassing. She hesitated and looked for assistance to a young man she had brought with her, when he promptly came to the rescue.

"Hum—ha—Oscar Wilde has not written much *yet*," said he, significantly, "not—hum—ha—*yet*. But his University Prize Poem is great,"—whereat Dr. Tyndall's face wore a somewhat sardonic expression, and Lady Claud, anxious to smooth matters, hastily interposed; "I found myself rather out in the cold yesterday, because I owned to ignorance about this Oscar Wilde," said she, "but if his works are still in the future, I don't see that I need have been glared at as I was."

This happened in 1874. A few years later, the cult of which the great Oscar was the head and front, was in full swing.

We had an instance of it in a very bumptious young lady, who came in, clad in an extraordinary mixture of green and yellow, to the Burdon-Sanderson's one day. (Dr. Burdon-Sanderson was not then "Sir John," and he and his wife still lived in London.) This youthful miss, who was an ardent disciple of Oscar's, evidently considered that the mere fact of being so, reflected such glory on herself that she had but to speak to be listened to by all within hearing. Accordingly she took the floor the moment she came in.

"Oscar Wilde," she said, "is constantly with us. We have the privilege of being his friends, so I can tell you about him. In front of our house is an almond-tree. It was covered with blossom this spring, and he could hardly speak to anyone one day, for gazing at it. I said to him, 'Is it not *too* beautiful?' He turned his great eyes upon me, and replied, 'I should like to be invited to this house simply to meet that almond-tree; I should even prefer it to a tenor voice.'"

Here she paused, whether overcome with rapture at such a sentiment or expecting us to be so, and to express our admiration. As no one said anything however she resumed.

"Once when Oscar Wilde was ill—he can be ill sometimes, you know, he is not really robust, indeed he would *hate* to be so—he sent for a doctor, who gave him a prescription. But when it was made up at the chemist's, Oscar Wilde shuddered. The medicine in the bottle was a dingy brown colour, and the pills were grey. They were sent back to the chemist at once, with this message, that unless he could make both the draught and the pills beautiful, Oscar Wilde could not take them. 'Tell that man,' said he—(he told me this himself)—'that I know I may be ill in consequence, but that I am willing to *die* rather than to pollute my lips with that ugly stuff.' The chemist knew 'Oscar Wilde,'—(every time she said 'Oscar Wilde' I had an inward convulsion; it was the breath of a worshipper at a shrine)—and at once proceeded to carry into effect his wishes. The fluid in the bottle came back rosy-red—oh, a heavenly colour—while the common-looking grey pills shone like gold!"

"When he took them?"

"Oh, yes; his soul was satisfied and he took them—and recovered."

"Wonderful!" Who was it that said "Wonderful"? I don't know; neither Mary nor I had the hardihood.

There was however an old lady in the company who had listened attentively to all this, and who was now anxious to be enlightened. "Who is this Oscar Wilde that you seem to think so much of?" said she. "Who is he, and what is he? Is he in the army?"

"In the army?" The girl looked as if she could scarcely believe her ears.

"Say that again, please?"

The venerable Mrs. Lumsden, imagining that such a peremptory request could only mean that her young friend was slightly deaf, repeated her remark in a raised voice, on which a blush of mingled wrath and scorn overspread the disciple's face, and she cried shrilly—"Oh, *how* good—that is really *too* good! I think I must send that to *Punch*!"

Perhaps it is hardly to be wondered at that Mrs. Lumsden should have expressed herself in a style that would have done "Punch" credit, when next the topic of the modern girl was started.

People were then beginning to talk of the "Modern girl," and Mrs. Lynn Lynton was writing her "Girl of the Period" series—but I really think for sheer absurdity our specimen at the Burdon-Sanderson's outstripped any I ever met before or after.

Sometimes she was not even ridiculous, she was simply impertinent. Thus, on another occasion at the Spottiswoodes, where she was received for old friendship's sake, she thus addressed the principle guest present. "I am sure you are celebrated for something; please tell me what it is!"

"I think it must be for my sweet temper," said he. Mary heard him. "And he may have the sweetest temper in the world," said she, "but he baffled that minx, and I think liked doing it."

The minx however must have speedily recovered, for she out-did herself when next we heard of her. She had been taken in to dinner by an eminent man, who declined to be drawn out against his will. After pestering him in a manner to make him inwardly wince, and getting no satisfaction in return, she looked him in the face as she rose from dinner, and said loud enough for all to hear, "Well, it may be an *honour* to be taken in to dinner by you, but it certainly isn't a *pleasure*!"

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To return to Oscar Wilde. Mary knew an aunt of his, who gave her an account of his marriage some years after this.

Mary had often seen the young couple during their engagement, as they were making a stay in the same country neighbourhood. She only knew the Wildes slightly, and did not expect an invitation to the wedding, as people in those days did not send out indiscriminate invitations as they do now—but it surprised her to hear nothing whatever of the event till it had actually taken place.

"I can explain that," said the great Oscar's aunt, "my nephew was so afraid of the crowds sure to assemble, that he and his bride decided to keep the day of the wedding a dead secret. They kept it even from their respective families—at least, from the collateral branches."

"Yet they meant to have a sort of function, too;—I don't think," she smiled, "that either of them would have fancied a hole-and-corner business. But I know for a fact that the bridesmaids—the bride's own chosen friends—did not know the day, or hour, or church, or anything whatever till within the week, and *then* they were sworn to secrecy."

"After all, would there have been such a crowd?" demurred Mary.

"I don't know. Very likely not. My nephew's fame

—if you can call it by such a name," replied the aunt, (I forget her name,) with rather an enigmatical emphasis, "is not I fancy wide-spread among the common herd."

She then went on, also half-laughing, half-serious, to tell us about her wedding-present to the young couple. "You must understand that they are not particularly well-off," said she, "and a cheque is always acceptable, well-off or ill-off,—so I gave them fifty pounds, and hinted a hope that it might be spent on something useful. Oscar has taken a nice little house, and had not at the time he married laid in any furniture except a clock, a table, and three Chippendale chairs."

"Like 'Traddles' and the flower-vase!" murmured Mary, aside.

"Eh?" said the aunt.

"Oh, never mind," said Mary.

"Tell me afterwards," said the aunt. "I'll finish my story first. When they came back from their wedding-tour, they came to show me with great exultation, two handsome Apostle spoons which they had bought with my cheque! They were so confident of my approval that it was really pathetic, but you know, I could have boxed their ears. And I am glad to think that I did give it them roundly:" concluded the good lady. "Fifty pounds is fifty pounds to me, and it is, or ought to be, very much fifty pounds to them; and to spend the whole of it on a couple of spoons! They are not fit to be trusted with money, that's the truth,—but, well, Oscar is so clever that he'll manage to rub along without it. And now, who was your 'Trammels' or whatever his name was, and what was it about his vase?"

"My dear, you have read your 'David Copperfield' I suppose? Have you forgotten David's friend, Traddles, who prepared for matrimony by the purchase of stray articles, among them a flower-vase? And—"

"*Of course* I remember," said Oscar Wilde's aunt. "But my nephew will never make a name in his profession as 'Traddles' eventually did, I fear."

"He has made a name of sorts, already," said Mary.

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One night Mary had a very lively party, and Mr. Farrer Herschell was the life and soul of it. He was in great spirits, having just been returned for Parliament as member for Durham.

A number of good stories were told, and I must try and recal one or two. Mr. Herschell, as usual, was the first to start. He led the way with a comical account of a barrister he knew, who was decidedly on the cracked side, but not sufficiently so to be prevented doing what he chose. He chose to fall in love with a girl far beneath him in station, quite a respectable one, but dying of consumption,—(and as a matter of fact she did die, just twelve days after he married her). "The best thing she could do," observed Mr. Herschell, in parenthesis, "but that has nothing to do with my story. The girl's father kept an eating-house in Marylebone Road, which opened into a little court, quite a nice little court, off the main road,—and thither regularly every evening the lover proceeded to take up position before his dear one's window.

"It was then his fancy to serenade her, and as he had a good strong voice, the whole court was treated to his strains, especially to a favourite, 'Say you love me, Fanny darling? Fanny, say you love me?'

"At last, one hot night in June, when the voice began its usual plaintive adjuration, the end came. A window on the other side of the courtyard was flung furiously open, and a head and shoulders protruded. 'For Heaven's sake, Fanny, tell the gentleman that you love him, and let us get to sleep.' Poor fond swain! He had just enough sense to feel the ignominy of it, and Fanny was besought for her affections no more."

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It was now the turn of Mr. Val Princep, who began by asking the company generally if they had read a book called "Paul Ferrol"? As nobody had, he proceeded to give his reason for putting the question. "I had an introduction to its author," he said, "and went to visit her,—for 'Paul Ferrol' was written by a woman, although many thought it was by a man. I found a pleasant enough lady, but with something *queer* about her which puzzled me not a little. She walked in the strangest manner, with a sort of jerk and hitch, exactly as if she were a walking doll—indeed, I could have sworn that there was the click of wheels as she crossed the room! The visit passed off all right however, and presently I went again. Again I noticed her curious clock-work motions and heard the clicking of invisible wheels, and then,—really it was awful, somehow she lost her balance, and down she came, and Jove, if there wasn't a whizz as if a steam-engine had been upset!"

He stopped to laugh, and proceeded: "It was no laughing matter at the time, I can tell you. That which I had heard must have been real wheels, for it turned out that the poor thing was destitute of legs, and propelled by machinery. Of course I made myself scarce as quickly as possible, for her face of helpless mortification showed that this was the best thing to be done, and I was wondering afterwards whether I could ever risk that fearful 'Whizz' again, when I heard of her death.

"She had fallen again—perhaps the wheels were wearing out—and into the fire that time, and no one being by to pull her out, she was so badly burnt that she died. You may ask my sister, Mrs. Duckworth, if this is not true," concluded he, "for she knew the poor machine-made lady, and kept her secret for years."

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"Who is going to amuse us next?" said Mary.

"I am," said Mr. Bradley Alford. "I am going to tell you about Bishop Colenso and the spiritualists. All the time that Mr. Princep has been describing his machine-made friend, I have been thinking if her mysterious wheels could not have been turned to account by the spiritualists who thought that they had caught Colenso the other day. If *they* had known about the wheels, and *he* had not, I guess they could have made use of them somehow.

"As it was, they made nothing of their bishop. Much against his will, he was dragged to a séance, and it was announced that a spirit was in attendance. They took it by turns to inquire the name of the spirit, and when it came to Bishop Colenso's turn, the rap in answer was first interpreted 'M,' then 'O,' then 'S,' and the bishop could stand no more. 'If you are going to say "Moses,"' snorted he with the most sovereign contempt, 'I'm off. Moses, indeed! Never heard such humbug in my life. Sheer unmitigated buffoonery,—' and such a breath of fresh air was let in by his loud, breezy tones, that the séance had to break up, and whoever impersonated Moses fled the scene."

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"Shall I tell what happened to myself this afternoon?" said a quiet, elderly man called Dr. Lee, who had been turning his eyes from one to another of the speakers, evidently enjoying this informal party and not unwilling to add to its gaiety. "I am terribly short-sighted, but as long as I can get along without spectacles, I do.

"To-day I was standing by the Marble Arch, waiting for a bus to take me down Oxford Street, and thought I saw it coming, heavily loaded with outside passengers.

However, as I only wanted an inside seat, I ran forward and hailed it. To my disgust, it only rumbled on, and hearing some people near laugh meaningly, I looked again at my supposed bus, and found it was no wonder that my shouts and gesticulations were unanswered, as they had been addressed to a *hearse*! The crowd of outside passengers resolved themselves into nodding plumes, and to complete my confusion, a working man, with a broad grin on his face, addressed me, 'You are the first gent as ever I see so uncommon anxious to get into a hearse!'"

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"And now, dear Sir Edwin, what have you got for us?" said Mary to gentle old Sir Edwin Landseer, sitting at her right hand.

"Oh, I have something very nice," said he, with cheerful alacrity. "Something in which I played a distinguished part, too. You know I have been away from home for some little time, so am not up in things, and when a friend came the other day to ask me to go with him to the South Kensington Museum, where the pictures were to be exhibited by gas-light for the first time, I was very glad to go.

"Of course I wanted first and foremost to see my own picture, 'A Visit to Waterloo,' and we made straight for it. But I was really horrified: I said to him, 'George, I think I must have been mad when I painted that picture.'

"George is a good fellow, and holds it to be a friend's part to admire unreservedly, so he declared that he did not know what I meant,—at which I placed my hand over parts of the picture that I particularly disliked, to try and make him see their faults.

"We were in the thick of discussion, and my hand was still over the picture, when up rushed a policeman. 'Now then, sir, 'ands off, if *you* please.' . . . Then more peremptorily, 'Take your 'ands off, I say.'

"'My good man, I was only explaining to my friend how badly the picture was painted,' said I, beginning to move off. But he meant to have his say out.

"'You was, was you?' sneered he. 'Oh, yes, I'll be bound you was. Dessay now, you thinks you could do it better?'

"'Just what I *was* thinking, my friend. I could do it better, and I wish I had the chance, for—I am ashamed of it.' You should have seen his bewildered look as I spoke the last words," added the great painter, with a chuckle. For all his modesty, I think he liked telling his little tale.

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Before we got up from the dinner-table, one other anecdote was told, and this time it was by Mary herself.

"I walked home with Dr. Dykes from his Wednesday Bible Class to-day," said she,—("oh, yes, I go regularly to those classes—" in answer to an exclamation)— "and they are delightful, I assure you. But I don't often have the chance of walking home with Dr. Dykes. He is a perfectly charming companion, and to-day he told me such a funny thing that I got him to write it down when we turned into the Park. People who recognised him, and there must have been heaps who did, must have wondered what on earth he was doing! We sat down under the trees, and he tore a leaf out of his note-book, and here it is."

With this, she dramatically produced the little crumpled bit of paper which had been stored up in readiness.

"It is a description of the Patriarch Abraham, given by a boy in Dr. Dykes' Sunday School," said she. "Now listen—'The Patark Abram was the father of Lot, and had tew wives. Wun called Hishmale and tother Haygar. Abram kep one to mind his house at home, and druv tother out into the Dessert, and she became a pillow of salt in the day, and a pillow of fire by night.'"

"I think I should like to go to Oswald Dykes' Sunday School," murmured dear old Sir Edwin, gently.

"Well, then, perhaps you will like this," said Mary, starting again. "I went to call on a clergyman the other day—no one you would know about—and as his wife was out, and there was something I particularly wanted to see him for, I asked to be shown into his study. There was an odd, sweet smell in the room, and from the table smoke uprose. He was burning incense!

"Oh, my dear friend," said I, "I have caught you necromancing, or what does this mean?"

He laughed cheerfully, and put something over the incense to turn it off, as it were,—when I said, "Pray don't."

"Oh, it's no matter—now," said he, "it's all right now. It was only an experiment—but I'll tell you. After I had been instructing my class in the Sunday School for a whole hour on the Scripture narrative of Zaccharius in the Temple, I asked the children what Zaccharius was doing when the angel spoke to him? And what answer did I get? '*Burning insects before the Lord!*' It seemed to me that the only thing to be done was to get some incense, real genuine incense, and burn it before their eyes. But I had to make sure that it would burn," concluded he, "and had just set it alight when you rang the bell. Ten to one they'll still imagine that it's made of insects however," he subjoined resignedly.

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Mary was then besought to tell about her own little nephew, who was at an age when oddities are to be looked for from clever and original children. "I think I must tell you about Harry's essay," said she. "His mother sent out invitations for a party, on his eighth birthday, and as one of his presents was a magic lantern and he was desirous of showing it himself, she thought that sufficient entertainment was provided.

"Not so Harry. He has great ideas. As the ten invited guests were all younger than he, he felt that it behoved him to instruct as well as to amuse them, and accordingly he prepared to do so.

"The day before the party he said to his mother, 'I have written a little essay, which I shall read out to-morrow to the children. It is about James I.'

"She suggested that it should first be read aloud to her?

"It had at least the merit of brevity, but as its first critic hardly considered it would appeal to the very youthful audience, it could nowhere be found on the appointed day."

"It was safe in my desk," explained Mary, "where Harry's mother knew no one would look for it; and I turned it up the other day. James' appearance and character were thus summed up in the final sentence,—"He had goggle eyes—he died of oldness—he was tolerable."

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"Harry is precocious," continued Mary, "but I don't think he is *quite* as precocious as a French child I once met abroad. He was not really a child at all, but a finished Frenchman at the age of four. Every evening he sat opposite to us at the hotel table-d'hote, partook of every dish, drank his wine like a man, and poured some of it over his strawberries like an epicure.

"I was so much interested in the little oddity that we made acquaintance across the table, and I said that I hoped to see him again after dinner?

"He bowed gracefully, 'Mais oui, madame, au Casino.'

"Here the mother interposed, 'Non, mon enfant, pas au Casino.'

"'Alors, au théâtre,' said he.

"The possibility of spending an evening at home never entered into his dissipated little head."

CHAPTER XIII.

An amusing party at the French Embassy—Mrs. Charles cannot go to it in only a head-dress!—Mrs. Charles is an angel of mercy in the Underground Railway—Lady Egerton offered a railway cushion containing a dear one's latest breath—She flies from the disconsolate widower—Laying down the law on medicine to an unknown fellow-passenger—Who turns out to be Sir Andrew Clark, the eminent physician.

We had returned from an afternoon round, and were examining the cards and notes on Mary's hall-table, when she suddenly flew back, cannoning against the footman who was bringing in the paraphernalia, and exclaimed, "Stop the carriage!"

As he did so, she turned to me: "We must go out again. It is no distance, but do come with me; I will explain as we go." She then gave the direction, "Lewis and Allonby's," and we got in.

"What is it?" said I.

"You will laugh when I tell you. This," referring to a note in her hand, "is from Bessie Charles. Dear Bessie might have sent it hours ago, but of course she forgot, and so it only comes now, and there is barely time—but we'll manage it. Bessie is coming to us for the night, as you know,—and I told her to bring a gown fit for the evening party at the French Embassy, as I thought it would amuse her to go on to it. Well, she says her gown will do—Heaven knows if it will!—but she has no proper head-dress, and can I get her one? So now we must do our best, you and I, and be thankful that there is time,—for as likely as not she would have arrived without anything!"

Well, thankful? I was not very thankful, being tired and wanting to get to my own home,—but the thing had to be done, and I could not leave Mary alone to wrestle with it. People from the country—(and Hampstead almost seemed the country in those days)—always think that their friends in Town have only to step across the way into a shop, not reflecting that even such a step may be a burden to the already overburdened Londoner,—but the outside Mary ever did was to give vent to a grumble; she always executed the commission, whatever it was, and whatever inconvenience it put her to.

"If we don't get Bessie a cap," she said, folding her arms and leaning forward, "she will be quite content, but she won't shine at the party. I want your help in choosing something suitable."

"Must it be a cap?" said I.

"Do you think she would prefer a turban like Miss Matty, in 'Cranford'?" laughed Mary. "I daresay she would, for dear Bessie's taste is not to be relied upon, but we'll get something decent at Lewis and Allonby's—" and by the time she had got so far, the carriage stopped at Lewis and Allonby's door.

"Now, we must think of her face and her hair," whispered Mary, "but, dear me, she has not told us what her gown is, so how can we match it? Bessie's gowns are sometimes rather quaint—yes, a sort of head-dress," to the shopwoman, "suitable for an elderly lady." After we had chosen a band of black velvet, with a little tuft of white ostrich feathers, which would go with anything, we went our several ways, and as I, too, was going to the Embassy party, I awaited the result of our combined efforts with what the Americans call "Cordial anticipations."

If dear, charming, happy-go-lucky Mrs. Charles could put that bandeau on backside foremost, I knew she would, (she once went to a wedding with her bonnet upside down, in the days of boat-shaped bonnets when this was possible,)—but Mary's maid would see to it that no such bouleversement took place on this occasion, and I rather expected a triumph in the dear "Schönberg-Cotta" lady's appearance.

Still, I was prepared for anything, and being prepared for anything, I was like the immortal Scrooge unprepared for nothing, when Mary solus joined me in the Embassy cloak-room.

"She hasn't come, my dear. After all our cares and all our pains, she hasn't come. Oh, she is with us; I left her peacefully reclining on a sofa, quite resigned—but what do you think? Whoever it was that packed for her made a mistake about the party gown—Bessie declares that she has one—and an ancient black silk, very tired and dowdy, was the only thing in her portmanteau! It wasn't worth while sending up for the other, though John offered to do so—and so there's my Bessie, with *our* head-dress on, and the fagged out black silk below, quite amused with the whole thing, and not in the least vexed at missing her party! And now we'll enjoy ourselves," wound up Mary, with a very cheerful smile.

Mary herself was looking brilliant that evening. She wore a rich brocade, of the colour known as "Old Gold," with insertions of brown velvet and Point d'Alençon lace—and of course her best diamonds. Her bright eyes, her glowing cheeks, her white brow and glossy, raven-black hair threw into the shade many handsomer women—and she kept her fresh looks, while others among her contemporaries grew wan as the small hours approached.

For myself, I *felt* smart, and hoped I looked it, in white satin trimmed with silver lace, and garlands of field-flowers twining round and round the skirt. It was my Court dress, dear feminine readers, and very fine I thought it. Even you would perhaps have admired it, for it was gracefully long and narrow, the odious crinoline being defunct at last.

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Among the people Mary knew there was a lady whose name I forget,—but recal that she lived at Tunbridge Wells,—who, after the usual remarks, said, "I have such a funny little story for you. The other day I let my maid go to a servants' ball; she is a pretty girl, and well-behaved, and all that, so I made sure she would have a good time, and arranged to have my early tea brought up by someone else, that she might have no qualms about staying to the end of the ball. She was to be allowed to sleep late in the morning.

"But when morning came, behold! there was Emily. She had come home quite early, and would not 'Take advantage of my permission'—(she is rather grand in her language)—but had risen as usual.

"I asked if she had enjoyed herself, at which Emily coloured and hesitated. 'Thank you, ma'am; yes, at first I did enjoy myself very much, and thought I was going to have such a pleasant evening,—but at supper I was so insulted that I really felt myself obliged to come straight home!'

"'Dear me, Emily, who insulted you?' said I.

"'Well, ma'am, it was a young man who'd always been particularly polite and agreeable to me before. You'd have thought he would never have dreamt of such rudeness, and I did feel upset.'

"'But what was it, Emily?'

"'I had but just sat down to supper, when up he comes, and oh, ma'am it was really shameful. He says, "I hope, miss, your programme isn't full yet?" Full? I had hardly tasted a morsel. I had but just got a little cold chicken and ham on to my plate, and he might have seen that it wasn't touched! Full? Such a coarse, vulgar word, and such an idea, besides! I couldn't speak I was choking so, but I gave him one withering look, and left the ball.'"

The last words were thrown to us over the speaker's shoulder, as a little rush swept her from us, so we never heard the ultimate fate of the insulted Emily.

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Mrs. Charles was quite brisk when I went in to see her the next morning. "To tell the truth," she said, "now that the party is a thing of the past, I did not really care about going. Of course, going with Mary and you would have made a difference, you both with your gay spirits, enjoying everything, and knowing everybody—"

"A few people," murmured Mary.

"You always seem to me to know everybody in the room."

"But these great, cosmopolitan affairs are different. I have been to Embassy parties where I have known nearly everyone in the room, but in London it has to be quite a small assemblage if you are to do that. And of course there are constant changes in diplomatic circles; and just as one has got to know one set of delightful creatures, off they go, and total strangers come in their places."

"Yes; I know nothing about society," said Mrs. Charles, "I should really have been a fish out of water last night."

"I saw rather a pathetic little incident," said Mary, who always saw everything. "Lucy and I took up our stand close by the first door, and just off the main current. We were more amused there than if we had been pushing about the rooms—and missed nobody.

"Well, I saw such a nice family party come in, father, mother, and two daughters, and they too shirked the crowd on ahead and stood aside to see what would happen? You never saw a nicer little group, typical of the best sort of country gentry, father tall and thin, with handsome, well-cut, clean-shaven face; mother, nice, matronly figure, fair, soft, good-humoured face; girls like sweet may-blossoms. And somehow they didn't look like the people one usually meets; there was an air about the whole four that seemed to say, 'We are off our own ground, where we are great people and get much attention,—but we are quite content to forego that for a little while, and see life in this great hurly-burly.' So there they stood, expectant. My dear Bessie, they stood for two hours, and did not speak to a single, solitary human being!

"My heart ached for those poor dears," continued Mary, after we had exclaimed and I had recalled them to memory. "The girls who had come in looking so fresh and bright, rustling in crisp new tulle and silk, seemed as if their very frocks were drooping, the mother's placid smile had grown stereotyped, and the father was all on the fidget. *He* at least was dying to get away, ashamed and mortified, one could see, by the whole thing,—but I fancy the women hated to give in. You see, they would have to own to their sisters and cousins at home that their first London party—"

"'Mary, what an imagination you have!'

"Oh, yes, their first London party," nodded Mary, "I'm sure it was; and they had thought so much of it, and what a good beginning it would make! They would be sure to meet at it their neighbours, their principal neighbours, neighbours who sought to dazzle country bumpkins like themselves by tales of London gaieties. I could almost hear papa and mamma saying, 'Our dear girls must not be left behind. Suppose we take the two eldest up for a few weeks?' I am sure they were the two eldest, and that there was a whole nestful of others romping about in the hay-fields at home. Do you know," said Mary, earnestly, "it was all so real before my eyes that I felt inclined to say, 'Speak to *me*; let *me* be your friend; and if I can do nothing else, I can at least tell you Who's Who?'"

"Well, couldn't you?" said the author of "Kitty Trevylyan," with just the little wistful look she gives to Kitty's cousin Evelyn when the latter is longing to help someone.

"Impossible," said Mary.

"And we left them there," she added, after a pause; "and I am afraid the little sisters at home will have to hear of it some day, after all!"

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"I have nothing in the least pathetic to tell," said I, "but when I went off with that young attaché whom you admired so much, Mary, what do you think was his object? Not to enjoy my charming society, but to rid himself of that of another person! He had been told off to attend to Lady Somebody-or-other, and she was proving an incubus. And when he caught sight of me he saw daylight. He has been at our house, and the inhuman wretch forthwith presented me to the wife of our Minister to the Porte, who proceeded to address me in *French*. You know what a shocking linguist I am; however, I stammered out a reply, and dropped into English. And then, think of it, she rejoined promptly, 'Je regret, madame, que je ne parle point d'Anglais,'—and explained that she had only just arrived in England, and took it for granted that *French* was the language spoken here in all polite circles!"

"Good gracious!" said Mary.

"Yes, indeed; this French wife of an English diplomat actually had the ignorance and—and—"

"The impudence—" suggested Mary.

"—to think that we people of England did not speak our own tongue in our own land!"

"What did you do?" inquired Mrs. Charles.

"The best I could, but Mary knows what that is. I was never taken abroad till after I was married, and all the teaching of school-room days did not suffice to supply that want—as you will see when I tell you that I went into a shop one day at Bordighera, and in my very best English-French made an inquiry—when the girl behind the counter, in excellent English, was very sorry indeed but did not understand *Italian*."

"You were no good to your poor attaché, then?" said Mary.

"Yes, I was. I knocked down another ninepin for him. He had knocked me down, so I just fell against the next ninepin, in the shape of a sister-in-law, whom I spied near, and who lives at Biarritz. She struggled to my side, and saved the situation."

"But I know your husband speaks French beautifully," said Mrs. Charles.

"Ah, if *he* could have been with us last night! But he had a Directors' Meeting in the north, and was two hundred miles away. Those abominable meetings always interfere, just when he could be of some use to *me*," said I, angrily. I was with two friends who understood, I was not afraid to make believe.

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"Now, I really think I must tell you both something in exchange for your entertaining accounts," said Mrs. Charles. "I was not in such distinguished company as you were yesterday, but an odd little episode befel me that was quite interesting in its way. I came here by the Underground Railway; and as I was sitting in the station beforehand waiting for the train to come up, a respectable old woman, who might have been a laundress or someone of that kind, sidled up to me, and said in a shaky voice, 'Excuse me, ma'am, but would you tell me, is this here Underground Railway very dreadful? I suppose you have been by it before, but I never have, and I've said many a time I never would. "No," said I, "not if you'd give me a hundred pounds, I wouldn't." But then, me son, he comes to hear of it, and says he, "That's rubbish, old lady," says he. "You must get over that," he says. And he's brought me here, and he's outside, waiting to put me into the train when it comes up, but, laws, I'm so frightened!'

"I was so sorry for the poor old thing," continued Mrs. Charles, "that I took her in hand, and tried to cheer her up by saying that it was really not alarming, and that there was daylight at most of the stations.

"'Oh, well, that's something, for sure,' said she. 'And you look kind; I wonder if you would let me sit beside you, only you won't like to go third-class with me?'

"Of course I didn't let that come between us, and when the train came up, we stepped out of the waiting-room together, and there was the son, a fine, big man, waiting to receive her outside. He had been watching, I knew by his face. He thought it best not to interfere, though I daresay he chuckled to himself when, by looking through the window, he espied us in conversation. And he did not mean to desert his old mother, for he took her by the arm, saying, 'Come along;'—but the compartment was full, and there was no room for him. 'I'll take care of her,' said I—but I really did not expect what happened.

"Directly we plunged into the tunnel, down went her head upon my shoulder, and 'I feel that faint,' she murmured.

"'Come now, we shall be out of it directly,' said I—but she clutched me with both hands, and seemed as if she really would go off. The other people looked stolidly on, and no doubt thought we belonged to each other, for no one took any notice.

"Presently I asked if she felt any better? 'A little, thank you, ma'am,' she sighed, 'but, oh me,' with a fresh clutch of the hands, 'my son *would* be angry if he knew.'

"However, after a few stations had been passed, the poor old head rose up and the poor old eyes roved about. Finally she observed solemnly, 'It was God's truth you told me, ma'am, about its being daylight at the stations. I thought maybe you was only trying to give me courage like,—but anyhow I tried to believe you, and now I see it was all *true*—' after which she sat upright, and when I left and the son came in, she met him with a smile. It was rather a trying half-hour though."

"Dear friend, you were treading in your Master's footsteps that half-hour," said Mary, softly.

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We were to hear of another train experience the same day.

After Mrs. Charles had departed, we went to call on Lady Egerton, whom we found quietly reading in a shady back-room.

What a pleasant sight it was! How peaceful looked the cool little chamber, with its banks of flowers, its wide-open windows and outside blinds, and how good it was to find someone who was not "Just going somewhere," or had not "Just come in" from somewhere else.

Now, my dear Mary was, shall I say it? by nature restless: it was a flaw in her otherwise delightful character, and would doubtless have been corrected had children blessed her married life, but she had so much leisure, and energy, and love of novelty that it was perhaps natural to be forever on the wing.

For myself, I had many anchors, but still, as I have said, our afternoons were always spent together, and we flew about and sipped the sweets of every passing hour. I was young, I loved it,—who could have helped loving it?

Yet even then, the sight of that reposeful figure calmly settled down to read a book of missionary travel while all the world of Mayfair was buzzing in her ears, was one to make an impression.

Lady Egerton, however threw aside her book with alacrity when we entered. "I have been wondering when I should see you next," she said to Mary, "for I have kept something for you that was far too good for unappreciative ears. Do sit down and have tea. No, *don't* say you are going on somewhere,"—and we had no inclination to say it.

"Mary loves a funny story," continued Lady Egerton, addressing me, "and she was the first person I thought of when my little adventure came off. That was a fortnight ago, when we came to Town. We travelled up from Cheshire by that excellent midday train—you know it?—yes, I remember your saying how you used to watch for it to pass through your neighbourhood, being refreshed by the mere sight of anything going to London—you see, I remember that—well, it *was* rather nice to be coming to be among so many dear friends and relations again, but the day we travelled was terribly hot, and I had been fussed before starting, and altogether began to flag.

"My back ached as we rattled along faster and faster, and on the seat in front of me was an air-cushion, belonging to an elderly man, whose back looked broad enough and strong enough to need no support. I thought, '*He* can't want that cushion, and it would be everything to me.' So I sighed, and looked longingly at it, hoping to excite his pity—but no. He seemed quite impervious until at last I grew desperate, for I told myself that even if he didn't like lending it to me, he could not refuse, and at least I should have the cushion—so I asked for it, explaining that I was not strong, and that the shaking of the carriage tired me very much.

"For a moment he looked at me in a curious, fixed sort of way, and I thought he was going to say 'No,' and perhaps he was, but changed his mind, for he took up the cushion and handed it to me, saying, 'Madam, I will lend it to you, but one favour I must beg; on no account permit the air to escape! I implore you to be careful, for that air is very precious to me.' Here he heaved a deep sigh. 'It is the last breath of my beloved wife.'

"'Indeed, it is,' he continued, as I took the cushion from him, not knowing what else to do; 'when I knew that the end was near, I brought this cushion to her bedside, and said, "Will you breathe your last breath into this cushion, my beloved? I will keep it ever near me."' And with that he sighed again, yet with a look of solemn satisfaction on his face.

"You may guess how I felt," continued Lady Egerton, looking from one to the other. "I really *could* not rest my back, weary though it was, against the dear one's last breath, and it struck me, too, that the widower was—must be—just a little off his head on the subject,—so as we were mercifully drawing up at a station, I thrust back the cushion into his hand, muttering something about its being 'Too sacred a possession,' and darted out of the carriage.

"Probably *he* thought *me* mad, so we were quits," she summed up in conclusion.

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"That train witnessed another odd scene lately," said I, when we had done with the cushion story. "An old friend of mine, a clergyman, was travelling by it, and at Chester a fellow-traveller got in, and they two had the compartment to themselves. The papers that day were full of Mr. Gladstone's illness, and my friend, who is an original and independent thinker, felt inclined to air his views upon the subject. According to himself, he thoroughly harangued his companion, enlightening him upon all the debatable ground, and pointing out both what the ailment really was and what ought to have been done for it,—all of which was politely listened to, and not controverted.

"He did not seem to have any opinion of his own, and I had it all my own way," said my friend; "but you may judge of my feelings when at Euston Station my fellow-passenger got out before me, and his man came and popped down from the rack a leather bag bearing the name of 'Sir Andrew Clark'! Sir Andrew Clark! The great London doctor who had been summoned to Hawarden expressly for Mr. Gladstone's illness! What an old fool he must have thought me!"

"He could not have been an old fool, or he would not have seen the humour of it," said Lady Egerton.

CHAPTER XIV.

Lord Houghton's breakfast-party—He talks of "Mr. Smith"—And of his own projected big book—"Mr. Joaquin Miller is besotted with Richard"—Mrs. Proctor dilates upon her old friend's kind and generous nature—Sir John Nasmyth tells how his early struggles were alleviated by the thought of a "cheering wink"—He knew the prototypes of the "Cheeryble Brothers," who befriended him.

I HAD never had the good luck to go to one of Lord Houghton's famous breakfast-parties in earlier years, but one day about this time he came up to Mary and me in the Row, where we had drawn up in the shade on a hot June morning,—and making some kind remark about my novel, "Mr. Smith," began to talk about his own "little trumpery book" called "Monographs," which had just come out, and ended by inviting us both to breakfast on the following day.

"'Mr. Smith' brought you that invitation," said Mary, laughing.

Well, if "Mr. Smith" did, "Mr. Smith" brought me the prospect of a very great pleasure, and I felt deeply indebted to him.

I sat next my host, and he again reverted to "Monographs," (which I had read in the interval). Honestly, I admired it much, not only because it afforded vivid glimpses of many interesting personalities, but on account of the beauty of the writing,—and when he asked in a simple, humble sort of way whether I thought it could be developed and expanded into a "Big book," I assented with eagerness; who could doubt it?

"Well, you know, I think of trying," he said, modestly, "and if I had set to work ten years ago, there would have been some sense in it; but now—" his face clouded a little, "now, I don't know; I wonder if I am not too old?"

Well, he did look old; there was a lack of life in his languid movements, and of spontaneity in his conversation. He seemed as if he were trying to be himself—his bright, buoyant self—the self that had once been the life and soul of every gay assemblage—the magnet which drew all that was worth the drawing to the well-known house in Upper Brook Street.

Mary had often spoken to me of Lord Houghton's delightful parties, and his sister's well-known saying that a certain notorious criminal must have been hanged that morning, "Or Richard would have had him to breakfast," had had a very natural effect,—but I must confess that my own experience of Richard's hospitality was disappointing.

And I am sure that this feeling was shared by others; there were wistful, anxious glances cast from time to time towards one end of the table; there was a subdued tone about the whole entertainment.

Presently my neighbour on the other side observed in my ear, "He is fighting depression of spirit, as well as failing health, at last. He is suffering great uneasiness on account of his wife, and I imagine has had no good report of her to-day. She is down at Fryston, unable to come up—but I daresay you know this?"

I replied that Lord Houghton had told me so.

"I was surprised at his giving this breakfast-party," resumed my new acquaintance, "it is the first he has had this season—"

"My dear Miller," broke in Lord Houghton, leaning across me, "have you read a certain book called 'Mr. Smith'?"—and he enlarged. As he turned away, my companion smiled significantly, "But *now* I understand," said he.

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Mr. Joaquin Miller turned out to be an American and a poet. I liked the look of him, but he was so much occupied in studying his host and listening to everything that fell from his lips that he had not much attention to spare for me, and I secretly compared myself to the small child who went out to see the stars one night in company with a learned astronomer. She was inflated with pride as she set off, but returned flattened out. "I don't care very much for Sir George," pouted Miss Vanity, "he keeps taking what he calls observations of the stars, and takes no observations of *me*!"

"You need not take that to heart, my dear," said Mrs. Proctor, to whom I told my grievance presently. (Have I said that Mrs. Proctor was there? She was an old and intimate friend of Lord Houghton's, and had been to many such breakfasts before.) "You need not feel mortified by the American's neglect. He is besotted with Richard, has neither eyes nor ears for anyone else when he is present—and Richard is very devoted to him in return. You were meant to have a pleasant neighbour at breakfast."

"Yet Mr. Miller made a cutting remark on Lord Houghton," hesitated I, and told her about his "*Now*, I understand."

She laughed. "Oh, that's nothing. We all know our dear friend's little weakness, it is common property,—and of course this was a surprise party, and got up for *you*. But it is not like his old parties," she sighed regretfully.

"No, it is not like his old parties," echoed Mary, overhearing her.

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Lord Houghton was however more cheerful when next I met him.

We were again in the Row, and this time sitting on chairs, where he joined us. Possibly—just possibly—he may have felt that he had not shown to advantage at the breakfast-party—or it may have been that he was merely in better spirits—but he certainly did not seem the same person. He was bright and chatty, he hailed friends among the riders and walkers every moment, and his hearty laugh rang out quite often. Mary on the other side nudged me: "Now you are seeing the real Lord Houghton."

And now I perceived something of the charm of the real Lord Houghton. He kept making the most piquant and original remarks, not as if he knew he was making them, or meant to attract by them, but simply as though they flowed of themselves.

I had heard many stories of his absurdities and extravagancies, but cannot help thinking many of them must have been purely mythical, perhaps recounted by people who did not understand the speaker, perhaps by ill-natured gossips. Promptly I fell in love with the dear old man, and could have listened to him forever.

He ran on about the people he had known and places he had seen. Speaking of M. Thiers, then President of the French Republic, he asked if I had heard "The latest about Thiers?"

"It is said that Thiers is so full of one of the new custom-house regulations,—namely, the duty on raw material, yclept, '*Matières premières*,'" said he, "that he calls his wife 'Ma Thiers première!'"

"Ever met Thiers?" he inquired, conversationally. "Oh, he is a very decent fellow, you must meet him at my house some day—" and all at once he caught himself up, and sighed.

He had been so happy, so merry, the moment before, that there was something infinitely touching and pathetic in the sudden break of the voice. Too clearly it indicated the troubled pool beneath the dancing waters.

I wish I could remember what else we talked about, but it is gone from me. He did not tell anecdotes, for those I should not have forgotten, but with the solitary exception quoted above, his talk ran on easily and naturally, with here and there an exclamation of "There's So-and-So!"—followed by a comment that possibly would not bear repetition, yet was not spiteful nor malicious.

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"Did I hear Lord Houghton telling you about his handwriting?" said Mary afterwards. "No? I must have heard wrongly then—"

"—Stop," said I, "he did say something about pitying the poor devils who would have his writing to decipher, if ever he did work at his book—"

"—What made him say it? What brought the subject on the tapis?"

"He asked me how long it took me to write out a three-volume novel for the press? And I said about six weeks, but that I was not a quick writer. Most people would not take so long."

"Does it really take six weeks to write out a novel?" said Mary, in rather an awe-stricken tone, "but of course, you only write for an hour or two a day?"

"Four or five hours a day."

"And that is when the book is finished, and there is no more composition to be done?"

"Yes, when I have already gone over it many times: when it is practically complete, but so full of corrections and insertions as not to be fit for Mr. Blackwood's eagle eye. When I am satisfied that I can do no more, I take a fresh sheet and write it out fair and clear."

"It would not be 'Fair and clear' if Lord Houghton wrote it out however," said Mary, laughing. "There is only one man in England who writes a more perfectly diabolical hand, and that is Dean Stanley. I have had to write to both of these men to ask the import of notes received from them! I had to know, for it was a case of their coming to dinner or not. The only thing to be said for Dean Stanley is that his sister, Mrs. Vaughan, can generally contrive to decipher his hieroglyphics, but Lord Houghton's defy even himself, if he has forgotten what he was writing about."

"Then, what is to be done if the big book ever comes off?"

Mary looked at me a little sadly: "It never will come off."

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But though I had only this passing glimpse of one of England's great men of letters, and his benignant "Good-bye, my dear" were the last words I was fated ever to hear from his lips, I learnt about him much that was only known to his dearest and closest friends, from Mrs. Proctor, who could claim with truth to be one of them.

Among other items of interest, she related a moving story of a young genius of humble parentage, whom Monckton Milnes, (as he then was,) befriended. It showed his kindly, generous nature in such a light that our hearts burned as we listened, and though I cannot hope to do the narration the justice that Mrs. Proctor did, who told the story as few can tell it, I will recal what I can.

A familiar figure on more than one Scottish country-side, is that of a Nature-poet, born in the lowly hut, reared among the crags and heather, but too often, alas! blighted by an unkind world, and doomed to have all the fair promise of youth unfulfilled.

The "Land of grey heath, and shaggy wood" favours the birth of genius, but stops there. The growth is left to itself, unsupported, untended—and the mounting sap is chilled just when it most needs warmth and sunshine.

By united effort, the family into which such a *rara avis* is born, contrive to send him from their midst out into the great world, and perhaps he flies for a time, but it is only for a time. Disappointment, disillusionment follow, and despair sets in.

Then the end is not far off. Back comes the broken heart to die in the old home—if so far happy as to still have a home to come to,—more often he vanishes into the unknown through the medium of some obscure garret and all is over as regards this world.

"Richard Milnes heard of such a case," said Mrs. Proctor, "a stripling called Gray, in the first flush of youth, if such a term can be applied to so poor a 'Youth' as his. Gray's parents lived in Glasgow in a small, back street, with no outlook, no surroundings to inspire the mind—yet he was a real poet.

And he believed in himself. He had ambition, enthusiasm, and dogged resolution. He took steps to bring himself under Richard Milnes' notice,—(what he did I don't know)—but Richard caught fire at once. He did *everything* for that poor boy that money, and power, and the kindest, tenderest sympathy could do.

Gray had written a poem called "The Luggie," and asked to be allowed to bring it himself to Upper Brook Street, which request was granted—but even before the young man appeared, Richard went to him! Some wondrous instinct told him that his new correspondent was in bitter straits, and he to whom every moment of time was precious, routed out the wretched little lodging, taking with him food and wine. "I felt I dared not wait. Relief must be instantaneous," he told me.

From that hour he became the guardian angel of that unfortunate young genius. Not only did he supply him with money—not only did he try to interest others to bestow upon him their notice and influence—not only did he constitute himself his counsellor and critic—but he opened up communication with the poverty-stricken family, and—in short, I can hardly speak of it, even now. I have seen Richard's eyes fill with tears, when he told me of any new and distressing circumstance.

And Gray was difficult to deal with, as those wild, passionate natures often are. And the seeds of disease were deeply implanted in his frame. At last he became hardly responsible, frantic to be sent here and there in search of health, yet directly his wish was granted, equally frenzied to be at home again.

"Oh, he died in the end, of course," concluded Mrs. Proctor; "and to the end Richard stood by him, and bore with him. He would have worn out the patience of most men, but not a syllable of complaint ever crossed Richard's lips."

"And the poems—Gray's poems?"

"They were not sufficient for fame, but full of promise. 'The Luggie' had many beautiful lines in it. Still, I think the poor poet's letters to his benefactor were even better; his adoring love and gratitude, and joined to these his scrupulous self-respect and Scottish dignity, made them wonderfully touching,—if I can, I will get Lord Houghton to show them to you," broke off Mrs. Proctor, and considered a moment. "Not just at present. I don't like to trouble him at present, and the thought of the poor Scotch lad is always a sad one,—but when things are more cheerful in his own home—ah, I wish you could see him at Fryston—at Fryston as it *was*," she sighed regretfully.

But as this kind desire could not well be gratified, I ventured on a few inquiries about Fryston at the (then) present date?

"Fryston is a perfectly ideal English home," said Mrs.

Proctor, starting off with renewed vivacity. "You know what an English country-house *can* be, standing amidst its gardens and woodlands, the eye feasted by beauties far and near? You know how life meanders on through peaceful hours that melt into one another imperceptibly? Dull, some people call that kind of thing. And perhaps it would not suit some of us for long—"

"—Myself, for instance," thought I.

"But if, to the murmuring of woods and streams can be united society of the highest order, companionship of the most delightful character, intercourse with people, not merely congenial to you, but to each other, is not that perfection? I should not care to pass a single day, not one whole day, with friends who made much of their guests, but were disagreeable among themselves. It is so uncomfortable, to say the least of it. Even if they are too well-mannered to *snap*, there is the absence of smiles on the face, when one member of the ill-assorted family party is forced into communication with the other, that betrays a secret lack of sympathy, even if it does not amount to downright antipathy. Of course *you* know; *you* understand, and feel the same,—and you will feel it more, the older you grow. At present you are young, and can run about, and throw off the oppression,—but when you are my age, and have to sit by the fire on a bad day, and in any case be much more in the house than out of it, you will know what it is to feel yourself in an antagonistic atmosphere. My dear, I take very good care nowadays to know what the atmospheric conditions—those kind of atmospheric conditions—are likely to be, before I venture among them."

"But you never find them at Lord Houghton's house?"

"At Lord Houghton's house, I find sunshine all the year round," said Mrs. Proctor, sparkling up. "In that house, the sun never sets. Yet perhaps I should say, never did set—perhaps things are changed now, with the shadow that has fallen on it of late? Yes, her health of course. And he is such a devoted husband—however, I will go back to Fryston as I once knew it. He, Richard Milnes, as I knew him for so long, was one of those rare people, whose gaiety—never shall I call it frivolity—was not reserved for the outside world, where, as you know, it was dazzling, but irradiated his own domestic hearth; and his dear and gifted wife, as well as his children, had the full benefit of it.

"Her only apprehension was that he might not be invariably understood. He had such a light and airy way with him that I have seen her stealing a glance here and there to make sure that he was not being taken seriously when he was only in the veriest fun. *She* knew when he was frolicsome, but would others? For Richard could put on a mask of gravity that would take almost anyone in, and then he would catch your aside, and just—wink!"

"Would he wink?" said I, laughing, for I had something in my mind about a wink, which I felt sure Mrs. Proctor would appreciate, and wondered if now were the time to tell it, or if she had any more to relate about the Houghtons?

I thought perhaps we had heard enough, and that the garrulity of my kind old friend might as well be stayed for the present, so after a few vague remarks which served to break the thread, observed that Lord Houghton's wink could not at least have resembled that of another person I had just heard of, in that it probably had no such far-reaching consequences.

Quick as lightning, Mrs. Proctor was upon me. What did I mean? Who did I mean?

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She was so eager and responsive that I began at once. My husband had formed the acquaintance of Sir John Nasmyth of hammer celebrity, and brought him to our house. One night, when we three were alone, our guest volunteered a retrospect of his early struggles and the way in which they were surmounted. He went to Manchester as a very young man, full of alternate hopes and fears, bearing with him a letter of introduction to two brothers, named Grant, who were at the head of the iron trade. They not only received him with cordiality, but inquired into his affairs, and on his announcing his intention of setting up for himself, nodded a thoughtful approval.

"I told them everything," said Sir John, "as if they were blood-relations, for that was what they seemed like to me. Relations who really *feel* the tie of blood, I mean," he interposed, with a little dry twist of the mouth, "not the other kind who chuck a nephew into the gutter with a 'Take care of yourself, my boy.' No, not that sort at all.

"My old Grants were, I believe, the actual prototypes of the 'Cherryble Brothers' in 'Nicholas Nickleby,' so it was no wonder that my heart went out to them as it did.

"One of them inquired how much capital I had?

"'Seventy pounds,' said I.

"They did not even interchange a glance, though what it must have sounded to them with their half-million at command, one can imagine. I felt an inward squirm at the time, but put a bold face upon it, and the elder Mr. Grant went on quickly, 'That will not go far in the payment of wages, but never mind, make a beginning. I have confidence in you; and if at any time you cannot pay your men, come to me, and I will help you to do it.'

"As he spoke, he winked at me with his left eye, and rolled it about in such a funny way that I felt it was meant to be encouraging and significant, and went off quite happy.

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"Well, times were bad, often very bad, during the next year or two, and I had nothing but the thought of that wink to sustain me,—for I had made up my mind that nothing but dire necessity would induce me to apply for aid to the 'Cherryble Brothers.'

"I did not lose faith in them, but the very fact that they believed in me and in my self-reliance stimulated my resolve to show that I had real grit.

"So I held on, always saying to myself when an extra hard knock came, 'Come now, there are always the Grants, and that one would never have winked at me like that if he had not meant something.'

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"Then the tide turned, and I began to prosper. But it was not till seven years had passed, and I was a successful man with my own world at my feet, that I discovered by accident, what do you think?"

"What?" cried Mrs. Proctor, all excitement.

I had not meant the "What do you think?" for *her*, repeating merely the words as Sir John Nasmyth said them to me—but having made such an excellent point, I replied dramatically, "*The eye that winked was a glass one!*"

"No?" said Mrs. Proctor, delighted. "No! You don't say so!"

"It was, and the supposed wink was only a nervous contraction of the eyelid!"

"How Sir John did not find this out before, he could not imagine," continued I, "but somehow he never did, and added now, 'Well was it for me that my happy delusion remained undisturbed all through those years—or at any rate, during the first one,—for if the discovery had been made then, it might have been my ruin. I lived on, and toiled on, supported solely by the hope and courage that wink gave me.'"

"Marvellous!" said Mrs. Proctor.

CHAPTER XV.

We meet Carlyle on the Chelsea Embankment—"Toss for none of your doctors!"—Carlyle and Lecky at variance—An agreeable diner-out relates his difficulties with a too frank relation—Her strictures on Mr. Holman Hunt's picture in the artist's own studio—Cambridge dons cruelly hoaxed—Lady Augusta Stanley relates how Queen Victoria dined with her and the dean to meet men and women of letters—Lady Augusta's views of mothers' rights—Dean Stanley's Flower Show.

We were rambling about Chelsea one day, trying to pick up the old china that is still to be found there if you know where to go for it, when we came upon Carlyle turning up from the river towards his own house.

He did look old and worn; not having seen him for some time, I was struck by the change in his appearance. The old Adam is however as strong as ever within, as was evidenced by a little story of him, told by the next person we met to whom we remarked, "We have just passed Carlyle, and think he looks ill."

"Aye, he is not at all well," said he—(I forget who he was)—"and as for seeing a doctor, he declares he would as soon see somebody else, whose name also begins with a D."

"Of course, he does not take half enough exercise," continued Mary's friend, who lived in the same street as the Sage of Chelsea, "and when he does go out for a walk, it is a mere potter. He shambles along thinking of something else, and knowing so little of where he is going that if at the end of five minutes after setting out, anyone took him by the shoulders and turned him round, bidding him go home again for he had walked enough, he would meekly obey. I won't say I have known him do this, but certainly he has said to me more than once, 'I can't for the life of me tell where I've been, or how long I've been out. I suppose I've been out long enough?' "

"And you have to decide if he has been out long enough?"—said Mary.

Her friend laughed, and then suddenly looked grave. "I tell you what it is, we shan't have that great man long with us; and although it was all very well for him to defy the doctors ten years ago, he can't do it now. Did you ever hear how he turned on a poor country practitioner down at my brother-in-law's place, where he had an attack which frightened everybody, for it was uncommonly like cholera, and cholera was about? My brother-in-law took it upon himself to send for the village doctor, a worthy old fellow with a long-established practice, and you may suppose Aesculapius was not a little flustered and flattered at being summoned to such an illustrious patient. With the utmost alacrity he made his way to the Hall and was shown upstairs to the patient's bedroom—but there his self-complacency received a rude shock. My brother-in-law told me he did not know which way to look when a shaggy head uplifted itself from the pillows, and peered over the bed-clothes, '*Who's that?*'

He replied that it was the doctor, whom he had thought it right to send for.

"'Doctor?' thundered Carlyle, 'I'm for none of your doctors. Of all the sons of Adam, men of medicine are the most unprofitable.'

"And the poor unprofitable man of medicine found it impossible to obtain a hearing," said our informant, shaking his head, "and had to retreat, baffled and terrified. The worst of it was that his visit so annoyed and roused the

Sage, that it put fresh spirit into him, and he began at once to get better, all the time railing at doctors, and triumphantly pointing to his own case as proving his point against the faculty!"

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At a dinner-party that evening I related the incident to my neighbour at the table.

"Carlyle can be quite on the spot however," observed he, "if he is really interested--and I can adduce an instance of this. You know Lecky—Mr. Lecky, the historian?"

I replied that I knew Mr. Lecky by sight.

"Having once seen him, it would be difficult not to know him again," laughed he,—indeed we both laughed, as the dome-like head rose before the mind's eye of each. A more peculiar-looking head I have never seen, and there was a momentary side-chase after it, but then my neighbour returned to the starting-point. "Carlyle and Lecky are friends, and occasionally walk out together." (At this I thought of the bent old figure and the halting gait we had seen that day on Chelsea Embankment, and mentally compared it with Mr. Lecky's grand form and stride—but forebore to interrupt.) "One day they had found their way to Highgate, of all places," continued my informant, "and were strolling about there, when Carlyle said suddenly, 'What brought me here to-day was a desire to see Coleridge's house once more. In old times I went there to see him on several occasions, but I can't remember the house.'

"'Can you remember the street?' inquired Lecky.

"But Carlyle shook his head. 'I don't think it was in a street, but I feel sure it was somewhere in this neighbourhood. Let us ask somebody.'

"The idea of asking somebody about a house wherein a man had lived thirty years before, seemed rather ludicrous to Lecky, who knew the rapidity with which dwellings in London suburbs change hands, and he poked fun at the Sage—but Carlyle persisted, saying, 'It can do no harm to ask.'

"By-and-by, perceiving a very old lady walking slowly towards them he pointed to her, saying, 'Look. She must be able to remember thirty years ago, and I daresay has lived here longer than that. I shall put my question to her; and mark you, she will answer it to our satisfaction.'

"Accordingly he took off his hat, and in the very polite manner he keeps for strangers, accosted the venerable dame. 'Can you be so good as to inform me, madam, which house hereabouts was once inhabited by the poet, Coleridge?'

"The old lady looked quite pleased and responsive: old people like to be asked for information, you know. 'Certainly I can, sir; I can point out the very house to you; there it is'—and she wheeled round, and indicated it with a stick, on which she was leaning. 'It belonged to my brother, and Coleridge was his tenant. I am a sister of Dr. Gilman.'

"Of course Carlyle had a great crow, and as for Lecky, he owned he was never more astonished in his life.

"But people who make shots in the dark do hit the mark curiously often," observed my new friend.

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He was an agreeable man, though rather of the order of diners-out who think over their conversations beforehand,—and as soon as we had done with one subject, he had another ready to produce. His eye wandered up and down the table as though cogitating what tap to turn on next?

Several notabilities were present, and at length he selected Mr. Holman Hunt, whose picture, "The Shadow of Death" was one of the topics of the hour.

"Know Mr. Hunt?" he inquired, and scarcely waiting for my affirmative, "Like his picture? Well then, you will be amused to hear what happened to me at a private view of that picture lately. I have an old aunt who comes and stays with me every season, and will go everywhere, and do everything; and unfortunately she caught sight of the Holman Hunts' invitation-card to their private view. I say 'Unfortunately,' not because I wished to do the poor old lady out of a treat that was quite in her line, but because she thinks herself a great judge of pictures, and is dead against the pre-Raphaelite school. In fact, she grows quite venomous when she talks of it.

"So I said, 'You won't care to go to this, ma'am?'

"Oh, but I was quite out there, I assure you. Not go? She bristled up like nothing in the world but an old aunt who expects to be kow-towed to because of her money. She assured me that I was very much mistaken in supposing she did not care for pictures—(I had never supposed this, but it had to pass,—) and that although she did not always admire those by Mr. Holman Hunt, she would at least like to have the opportunity of judging for herself the merits of the 'Shadow of Death.'

"Accordingly we set off, and saw a lot of people, friends of the artist's, passing into the house before us. My aunt is so terribly outspoken, and so unconscious of it, that I risked a hint as delicately as I could. 'Tell *me* your opinion of the picture as frankly as you please, as soon as we come away, my dear aunt,—but inside these doors, do be cautious. Remember, we are expected to keep to ourselves adverse criticisms, as Hunt is peculiarly sensitive to them.'

"'Trust me,' said she, with rather an offended air.

"But I didn't trust her, not a bit; and the event proved I was right. She is clever enough in some ways, diabolically clever just when it would be better to be stupid—

and directly she saw the picture, she forgot everything in looking at it. 'Know the picture?'"

Again, before I could do more than barely assent, he was off.

"People were sitting about in silence before it. Well, it *is* a wonderful picture, Jove, it is,—and you can imagine my feelings when suddenly my aunt's loud whisper was distinctly audible to all. 'The Central Figure isn't good; I don't think he stretches himself naturally; too much one way, in order to form the shadow . . . and as for the figure of the Virgin, it isn't good either. Why should she be kneeling, and looking into that box?'

"'It is supposed to contain some of the treasures brought by the Magi from Egypt,' whispered I, trying to stop her.

"'But who's to know that? However, that doesn't matter. What I object to are the two figures; if *they* were taken away, I should admire the picture.'

"'But if you take them away, what have you left of the picture?'

"'That little bit of landscape through the window. I like *that*,' said she.

"It was really too good; Hunt had to be told; and he had met with so much appreciation and adulation that day, that I think it really seasoned with salt what otherwise might have cloyed with sweetness."

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We were now to start a fresh tack. A Cambridge don was sitting opposite us, and made an excellent *raison d'être* for a Cambridge story.

"Ever been to Cambridge?" demanded my loquacious neighbour.

It appeared—with variations—to be his usual opening.

I admitted that I had been to Cambridge once, during the Cambridge week. But of course it was not to talk about the Cambridge week that he wanted; I looked at him, and saw another anecdote ready to burst from his lips.

"I went down there to stay with Humphreys," said he. "Know Professor Humphreys? Big dog at Cambridge, and all that sort of thing."

I had however sadly to acknowledge that I had not the big dog's acquaintance.

On the whole, I think this was a relief to both of us. I had so often said "Yes" and got no good of it, that frankly to admit complete ignorance, ignorance without any extenuating circumstances left him untrammelled to speak, and me to listen.

He was a bore; but a loquacious bore possesses this merit, that he amuses himself, and does not expect you to amuse him. I drew a bonbon dish of salted almonds my way, and awaited with resignation the Cambridge story.

"Talk of my aunt's making a *faux pas*," began my friend, (*he* had talked of it, *I* hadn't, but no matter,) "I was worse than she the other day among the dons. I went down, as I said, on a visit to Professor Humphreys, and as everyone was talking about the Shah, (it was just after the Shah had left England,) I asked if he had honoured Cambridge with a visit while in this country? It was an unfortunate question, and several of the learned fellows present looked at each other; however Humphreys only said shortly that Cambridge had not been selected for His Highness' itinerary. He looked a little discomposed, and it was pretty plain that I had put my foot in it, though I could not imagine how.

"When we were alone, he began at once, 'It was rather an awkward thing you said just now about the Shah. Oh it was nothing to mind about, for it showed at once you had never heard of it—but—'

"'Never heard of what?' said I, feeling thoroughly uncomfortable. 'And why was my question awkward?'

"'I'll tell you,' said Humphreys. But I must premise that we Cambridge dons thought everybody knew the trick played upon us—and as in a small world everything looms large, we hardly knew how to hold up our heads after it. The Shah was all the rage in London as you know,—and one day the Heads of the University were startled out of their academic calm by the news that a telegram had been received by the Vice-Chancellor purporting to be from the Lord Chamberlain.

"It was sent to prepare us for a visit from the Shah which had been hastily arranged for the following day, when he was to travel down by a certain train—and the Lord Chamberlain trusted that His Highness would be received by the authorities with befitting ceremonies.

"'We were not over-pleased, as you may suppose,' said Professor Humphreys, 'these state visits are dreadful nuisances; but of course we hurried and scurried, and interviewed the station people, and ordered carriages—and a grand luncheon was to take place in the great dining-hall of Trinity College—and at last all was in readiness, and we robed and assembled to meet the train by which the Shah was to travel.

"'The train arrived, but where was the Shah?

"'It had been plague enough to have all the fuss of preparation and interruption of routine, but had we been made fools of into the bargain? We had—we just had.

"'And it soon got about, and spread like wild-fire.

"'And we had to slink back to our colleges with our tails between our legs, and hardly liked to speak about it even to each other,' said Humphreys, in conclusion.

"'It's rather beastly for dons to be the victims of a hoax, you must admit;—so now you know why we looked a little blue, when you innocently asked, Did the Shah come to Cambridge?'"

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To own the truth, I thought this whole tale distinctly prosy, and cannot imagine why I repeat it.

It did not seem to me much fun to wake the poor pompous dons out of their dreams of academic bliss, and dangle a barbarian potentate before their eyes. There was nothing ridiculous in what they did. If they had burned with desire to prostrate themselves before the barbarian potentate they might have been fair game and there would have been some sense in showing them up,—but these sheep, what had they done?—King David might have said.

So I was glad when the dinner was over, and the ladies went upstairs.

Presently I saw Mary looking round for me, and she whispered as she led me up to a lady, "I have been telling Lady Augusta Stanley of our being in Chelsea to-day and seeing Carlyle."

I was then presented to Lady Augusta, who, after a few compliments on my latest novel, said, "I hear you thought Mr. Carlyle looking very old and sad to-day. He is failing fast, I fear—but I have not seen him lately. The last time I saw him was on the occasion of which perhaps you have heard, when the Queen did the dean and me the honour of coming to meet a few distinguished literary people at our house? No? Well, it was strictly private by Her Majesty's desire, but there can be no harm in telling you about it now.

"When I was last at Windsor, the Queen was talking about the formalities which hedge about a Sovereign, and remarked that she would be glad to dispense with these and meet a few men of letters in a quiet way, if it could be managed?

"Of course I replied that it was only for Her Majesty to fix a day and name the guests. At first Her Majesty decided to have only men at the party, but ultimately concluded that Lady Lyall and Mrs. Grote should accompany their husbands. Are you acquainted with those ladies?" broke off Lady Augusta.

I replied that I knew the Lyalls, but not the Grotes.

"If you have not seen Mrs. Grote, you have missed something," said Lady Augusta, with a twinkle in her eye, "she is a most peculiar dresser, and once appeared at a great reception—Lady Holland's, I believe it was—in such a singular get-up that Sydney Smith observed that now for the first time he understood the origin of the word '*Grotesque.*'

"However there could be no grotesque attire at the Deanery to meet the Queen, of that we could be very sure," reverting to her former theme; "Mrs. Grote knows where to draw the line, and appeared in a very suitable, quiet gown, and Her Majesty remarked upon it. Oh, the Queen knows about everything, I assure you. Nothing goes the round in certain circles that does not reach the Queen's ears. Dear me, I seem as if I could never get to the point, but you know," she ran on merrily, "we ladies of the Court when we are at Court have so little chance of *talking*, that when we leave we want to talk all the time, as Americans say. Now about the party. The other guests, besides those I have named, were Charles Dickens, Robert Browning, and Thomas Carlyle,—a glorious trio, were they not?"

"Indeed, yes."

"The Queen seemed to be chiefly interested in the old philosopher of Chelsea. Her Majesty had met Mr. Dickens before, and also the geologist, the poet, and the historian, in short all but the great Carlyle, which was strange, considering that his books greatly appeal to Her Majesty, partly owing, I imagine, to Her Majesty's German proclivities."

Here I made a mental comment to the effect that Lady

Augusta, although she had quitted Court life, still adhered to its usages, and never referred to her late august mistress as "she" or "her," but always as "the Queen" or "Her Majesty." Other ex-Ladies-in-Waiting were not always so particular, but Lady Augusta Bruce had been a personal favourite and was now a dear friend. I think this made her doubly punctilious.

"As soon as general civilities had been distributed, the Queen settled down to a good talk with Carlyle." Lady Augusta furled and unfurled her fan, and looked dreamily into the past, as the memorable evening rose before her eyes. "It was delightful to hear Her Majesty on the possible future of the Empire. And of course Carlyle roused up, and launched forth his great rolling periods as only he can. And all was going well, but for one drawback. Carlyle was an old man—you saw for yourself to-day how feeble he has grown—and I am talking of only a year ago,—he grew terribly tired of standing, yet as long as the Queen stood, he could not sit down.

"It was a great opportunity as well as a great privilege. If he had only been in his own arm-chair in the little Chelsea house, whence he is accustomed to shake his fist at the world, he would not have minded how long the discussion went on,—(he said this afterwards)—but as it was, he could hardly bear the pain in his back!

"The Queen had no such feelings; Her Majesty is accustomed to giving long audiences to statesmen and diplomatists none of whom are Carlyles,—and when interested and elevated has no sense of time. We, who knew the Queen so well, were delighted to see the pleasure Her Majesty was receiving from the conversation, but I must own both the dean and I were apprehensive for her aged subject.

"At length he took the matter into his own hands," continued Lady Augusta, laughing, "and seizing a chair, bluntly suggested, 'If your Majesty would please to be seated, we could carry on the subject with greater ease.'

"You may guess how we all cast our eyes on the ground, but the Queen was so good. It was certainly the very first time in Her Majesty's life that such a request had been made by a subject—and you would have thought it was the most ordinary thing in the world! Still talking, the Queen subsided into a chair, and brave old Carlyle was happy for the rest of the evening. It needed a Carlyle of course to do it," appended Lady Augusta, in conclusion.

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"And now, may I be allowed to say a few words about your new novel, or would it be impertinent? 'A Stiff-necked Generation,' I mean? It *is* the last, isn't it? I thought so. I do want to tell you how very much, terribly much, 'Major Gilbert' comes home to me, for I know him, every inch of him. I never knew a 'Mr. Smith,' and wished I did, but I *do* know a 'Major Gilbert,' and wish I didn't. That is the perversity of life," laughed Lady Augusta. "I suppose—I wonder if you have been told this often?"

I owned that I had heard it before.

"It is really dreadful when a man is good, and worthy, and *vulgar*," pursued Lady Augusta, earnestly. "Especially when a girl belonging to you can't see it, and sets her heart on him. I have a friend on whom this calamity has fallen, and it was of *her* 'Major Gilbert' I was thinking, when I said I knew *yours*. She is not exactly a 'Lady Caroline'; no, poor dear, she really is *not*, but there is a certain resemblance which our family has found out. One of her girls spoke of it to me the other day.

"The odd thing is, that while they, the daughters, are quick enough to perceive their mother's high-handed tactics, they don't detect how these are roused to action by a certain person of whom *they* think all the world, (they are very young), and whom she, well—detests.

"They are inflamed to rebellion by her cold treatment of this 'Splendid soldier,' whom they assert she snubs shamefully—while for my part, I often wonder at her self-control.

"How it will end remains to be seen; but when I read of your 'Major Gilbert' I felt as if you must know mine?"—and she broke off inquiringly.

"No, I don't; I have no idea, Lady Augusta, who yours can be. I once knew a man from whom I drew my unpleasant hero," said I, "but he is dead, or I should never have brought him into a book. And he would have been old by now, if he had been alive,"—I added.

"Then I shall certainly put 'A Stiff-necked Generation' in the way of my young friends," said Lady Augusta; "I know how I can do it, by saying I have met you to-night. Now, you seem to know girls, tell me, do you think there is anything to be done in this case, in the way of putting a spoke in the wheel? Really and truly, it would be an undesirable match," she added, earnestly.

"I can only suggest Lady Godman's remedy," said I.

"Lady Godman?"—murmured she.

"She is dead. But she broke off an engagement which threatened disaster by a very simple method, long before she died. Her daughter was not to be reasoned with. She would engage herself to an objectionable youth, in whom nobody but herself could see any attraction,—and as there were no solid grounds on which to refuse consent, Lady Godman hit on an idea. Luncheon you know, Lady Augusta, is not a meal at which one shines. At any rate, it is not conducive to love-making. The aspirant was permitted to come to luncheon *every day*—but to nothing else. In a month the whole thing was at an end!"

"Excellent," cried Lady Augusta. "What an admirable mother! What a heaven-born diplomat! I shall certainly recommend that course of action. Luncheon? A detestable meal with everything unpropitious. Children and governess at one end of the table! Half the family just come in, and half just going out! All on the rush,—no peace—no privacy—no possibilities! My dear, your Lady Godman must have been a *very* clever woman. But," she looked at me shrewdly, "somehow, I fancy her real name was not 'Godman.' Eh? Well, well, one can't be too discreet. But now I must go!"

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She rose and looked for her hostess. Then turned to me with a sudden thought. "Won't you come to our Flower-Show next week? The dean would think it very kind of you to do so?"

Well, I had been rather dreading this, for I knew what Dean Stanley's Flower-Shows were like; indeed I had already been to one unbeknownst to the hosts, and was not particularly keen to go again. However, there was no escape when thus pointedly applied to, and Mary said she would accompany me. Mary was always ready for anything.

The grey precincts of Westminster Abbey looked quite gay, almost gaudy, when we drove thither on the appointed day; and the dear little dean had his work cut out for him shaking hands with his friends, for if they did but stay ten minutes, they wanted him to know they were there, and to remember afterwards that they had been there.

As Lady Augusta said, he "Took it kind" of people to attend this curious Flower-Show, unique of its class. It consisted solely of a display of flowers which the poor people of Westminster had cultivated in their windows, and I suppose nobody but Dean Stanley would have been able to bring the half of fashionable London to it. His personality was so endearing and his acquaintance so enormous, that the quaint little Show flourished during his life-time, but to have attempted to continue it under any other auspices would have been too daring.

The flowers were really wonderful, considering. And as the shilling entrance fee went towards prizes for the exhibits, there were some radiant faces among the poor folks of Westminster.

Presently Lady Augusta spied us out, and was for presenting us forthwith to some foreign Royalties, but experience had by this time taught me—(Mary always knew it—) how such an honour could be evaded, and we edged towards the departure gate. "How mean of you," whispered Lady Augusta, laughing, "I'll tell the dean."

"The dean will forgive us," laughed Mary back, and held up a bunch of roses, already decaying. "The dean will find a little cheque for these in the box."

"Oh, that will excuse everything," replied her ladyship, joyfully. "A thousand, thousand thanks. You are always one of our noblest supporters."

CHAPTER XVI.

The author of "John Halifax, Gentleman"—Mrs. Craik relates her own love-story—Mr. Holman Hunt paints "Dorothy's" picture—Mrs. Craik provides what she calls a lamb—"I wonder she didn't suggest toads and tadpoles!"—Mr. Wilkie Collins turns up again—American interviewers and their methods—"Let me embrace you for the company"—A story of a "Scunner."

I HAD a line from Mary one morning early. "Mrs. Craik that is, Dinah Mulock that was, is coming to luncheon, would you care to come and meet her?"

Would I care?

Care to meet the author of "John Halifax, Gentleman?"

By a flash, Memory went back to a lonely shooting-box in the far-off Isle of Mull, where first I read, or to be exact, heard read aloud that wonderful book.

It was in the terrible year of the Indian Mutiny, and as each day was saddened by the awful accounts—(although my family had no personal anxiety)—I remembered how my father would say as he settled himself in his arm-chair for the evening, "But now for 'John Halifax!'"—as for a streak of sunshine in the gloom.

Later on, I had seen the house at Tewkesbury accredited to "Phineas Fletcher" and his son, and all the different places in which scenes from the famous novel were said to be laid—and there were chapters in it that I almost knew by heart.

However much I disliked going out to luncheon therefore, and at that time I did dislike it, being at work upon a novel which usurped the morning hours until the last minute, I cheerfully laid aside paper and pencil and set forth.

But sometimes it is a pity to meet the giver of a great gift. "John Halifax" was a royal gift to every English reader—and Mrs. Craik was not attractive.

She was nice, and friendly, and kindly, but not interesting.

To begin with, her mind seemed to run upon furniture, as was perhaps natural considering that she and her husband had just moved into a new house and were thinking of carpets and curtains all day long,—but other people's carpets and curtains are not of supreme importance, and I remember secretly being a little impatient of the subject, and amused by Dinah's admiration of the rich Axminster web at her feet.

It was "Early Victorian,"—very "Early" and very "Victorian"—very thick, and soft, and bright, shockingly bright—in short, we all know the carpet. I sat in silence to hear it admired. At length when Mary's back was turned, Mrs. Craik asked me point-blank, "Don't you think this drawing-room carpet beautiful?—" then, quick to detect a dubious brow and reluctant consent, she met it thus: "If you were fated to have only grey felt in your drawing-room, you would admire almost any carpet."

"But if your taste is for grey felt?"

"Oh, it isn't," said Mrs. Craik, laughing, "indeed, it isn't. Not by any manner of means. It is my husband's taste I have to conform to,—" and she put on a demure look.

As she was the elder of the two by a dozen years, I thought I understood; otherwise, surely a woman is the head of the carpet-department in her own house.

Having relieved her mind however, Dinah seemed to bethink her that even carpets, like the Eastern Counties Railway, "must come to an end at last," and started another topic.

She told us about herself ; how a few years ago a man injured in an accident was brought to the house at Hampstead where she lived in maiden state. He had a slight acquaintance with her, but none at all with anyone else in the neighbourhood, and it was near Hampstead Station that the accident took place. Accordingly he could only think of her when asked where he would be conveyed to?

"I set to work to nurse him," she said, "and the nursing was no sinecure, for it was months before he was sufficiently recovered to be moved ; and well, by that time neither of us were particularly anxious for him to be moved at all! We were married just as soon as possible after that ; and we have been living about, here and there, until the other day, when we thought it would be nice to have a house of our own. So we looked round and selected one, and since then have been so busy furnishing—"

"—We are in for the carpets again!" mentally ejaculated I.

Mary, however, gave a dextrous twitch to the conversation. "Do tell us about the dear little girl you have adopted."

"So many people know the story that I thought you must," replied our visitor. "My husband and I make no mystery of it, but if you would really care to hear?"

—"Anything would be better than the carpets," muttered I to myself again.

"We were living at Beckenham," said Mrs. Craik, "and I was walking out one snowy morning about Christmas-time, when I met a policeman I knew, who stopped me. He said that on coming off night-duty that morning at six o'clock he had found a baby of about a year and a half old, wrapped in a shawl, and lying close to the gate of Beckenham churchyard. It was as cold as stone ; in fact, so frozen that he looked twice to make sure that it was alive on his way to the police-station, whither he carried it.

"I went with him to see the little thing, for I am so fond of babies that I felt interested; and it seemed sad to picture the future life of that poor innocent, if once it were immured in the Workhouse. Yet to the Workhouse it must go, unless—?

"That 'Unless' worried me; I could not get rid of it. I longed to adopt the poor little mite, but how would my husband feel about it? I could not conjecture.

"At last I took my courage in both hands, and told him what had happened, but nothing of what I hoped might happen. I contrived to interest him; and one day after we had had the child christened and I had stood godmother, he said he would like to see it if I could obtain permission for it to be brought to our house.

"Here was my chance. I bought a pretty white frock, and we brushed out the little golden locks, and it looked such a little darling that what I had hoped for actually took place. Whether it would have done so, if the little one had not by one of those strange intuitions children have, taken a fancy to my husband's kind face bending over it, I don't know, but it stretched out its little fat arms and laughed up at him, and he turned to me: 'We have none of our own; let us adopt her.' My heart leaped, but I was diplomatic, and replied cautiously, 'Let us wait a month, and see if we are of the same mind at the end of it.'

"During the month of course we talked of nothing but our baby," continued Mrs. Craik. "To take it for our own meant so much, so very much, you see. It would change our life completely. Still, we grew resolved upon the change. My husband advertised in all the principal papers, and set the police to work; but in vain, the clue was so light to start with. A little fine Indian work was mixed with the rags in which the poor infant was swathed, and we made the most of the Indian work—but nothing ever came of it.

"For myself, I only dreaded that something would; and when we had honestly done our best, and not a single reply had been made to our advertisements, we brought little Dorothy to our home with glad and thankful hearts. That is five years ago, and she is grown into a little girl by now. We shall in future treat her as if she were our own child, and call her so."

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"Dinah Craik is having her 'Own child's' portrait painted," said Mary, one day shortly after this. "I met Mrs. Holman Hunt in Bond Street this morning, and she told me her husband was at work upon it. She invited us to go and see how he has succeeded, for he has nearly finished. We can easily go this afternoon, for we shall be in that direction."

Mary never put an invitation aside till it was cold, till people had forgotten they had given it, and were surprised to see it acted upon,—and accordingly I was always prepared to include some new thing, delightful to us both as to the Athenians of old, in our afternoon's round. I think too such promptitude generally produced a welcome.

We were taken at once to Mr. Hunt's studio. There on the easel was the portrait of a perfectly lovely little girl, with hair a maze of gold, and a peach-like complexion. One could see at once how even as a baby the forlorn little thing must have won its way to the hearts of the childless Craiks.

And soon after we arrived, in came little Dorothy herself.

"Do you see my lamb?" she said, pointing to the picture, where a lamb stood by her side. "He didn't know whatever to do for a lamb at first," she continued, shaking her head gravely, "for the lamb would grow so fast he thought it would be a sheep before it could get done."

"And Dorothy grew nearly as fast as the lamb," said Mr. Hunt. "Naughty Dorothy!"

"Ah, but you haven't changed *me* as you did *her*," retorted Dorothy, with ineffable complacency. "You couldn't change me, 'cause it's my picture, but that isn't the real lamb, not the first lamb—" and she regarded the innocent animal with contempt.

"I can tell you, I really had a job to get a lamb at the right stage," confided Mr. Hunt to us apart. "When I began this picture I had a lot of others on hand, and it was obliged to wait for its turn, and every time I went for that blessed lamb it had grown perceptibly. I told Mrs. Craik of the difficulty. 'Oh,' she said, 'come down to us in Kent. Plenty of lambs there. Of course in London they are only to be had for the dinner-table.'

"I packed up my traps and went; and as soon as I was ready to work, a man appeared leading a huge woolly creature which Mrs. Craik was pleased to call a lamb. Bless me, it was a good-sized sheep! I felt regularly done, and ordered that sheep to wheel right-about and march.

"Then in comes my good hostess, and not in the least disconcerted proposes that cocks and hens should be substituted for the lamb—I wonder she didn't say 'Toads and tadpoles'—and quite seriously assures me that they would look every bit as well, etc., etc. I was surprised that she did not suggest a bunch of new potatoes instead of the orange in Dorothy's hand!

"It really was a nuisance, although the Craiks were very kind and hospitable, and all that. And a little house in the country, with a white paling round about, and green meadows full of buttercups beyond, is rather nice in June, —but when one has one's work to do, it isn't the time for buttercups,—" and he sighed and smiled.

"What did you do about the lamb?"

"Found one in Bushey Park, and it is all right at present. I shall have to finish it straight away, before it has time to lose its *lamby* look."

"You have a lovely sitter," murmured Mary, lowering her voice.

The painter looked at the child and nodded, his eyes lighting up.

"And you are doing her every justice," proceeded Mary.

He nodded again. "I should like—that's to say, I should *almost* like, to paint children always."

"But we can't spare you to do that," said Mary, gently.

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We turned into the Park, after leaving the Holman Hunts' pleasant house, and found it very full as it was a lovely evening.

"Do let us take one more turn," pleaded I, as the crowds began to thin, "it is only now that we can really see who is here, and—"

"—And there is Mr. Wilkie Collins," cried Mary, springing forward in her seat, "and I haven't seen him for ages and ages." She pulled the check-string violently, and in less time than it takes to write it, had bidden the footman pursue Mr. Collins and bring him to her.

He seemed delighted to be brought, and when Mary asked him if by a miracle he were disengaged for the next evening, and would dine with her, he laughed outright. "I haven't a single, solitary engagement," said he; "I have only just come back from America, and have looked up nobody yet."

"Oh, then, could you, and would you, come to-night? To-morrow we have a party, a large, ordinary party, but to-night I will try and collect a few choice spirits—"

"My dear Mary, it is almost dinner-time now!" protested I.

"Oh, let me come without 'Collecting' anyone," implored Mr. Collins. "If you knew what a treat it would be to have just old friends about me—do say to-night, and only ourselves!"

"That means you and me and our husbands," said Mary, nudging me with her elbow. She would have torn round like a whirlwind, and blown before her all the desirables she could think of on the spur of the moment, but when it was settled that these should be left in peace, and that Mr. Collins would be satisfied with our sober quartet, I think it was a let-off even to her.

Then Mr. Collins turned to me. "So the little lady is married?" said he.

I smiled happily, I was so proud of my husband, so well pleased to present him to friends old and new. "I suppose *he* sits and talks with you on the balcony now?" said Mr. Collins.

"And tells me about *his* school-days."

"Ah, you have not forgotten that? But the spider-hero is dead since then, and I never had a chance of reminding him of his exploit. Directly I saw his death in the papers, I thought of you, and your horror over it."

He had not forgotten this when we were sitting cosily round a small round table an hour or so later.

"It really had never struck me as anything horrible before. I only thought it clever and funny—but I tried it as a shocker on the Americans, and it was a failure. Lots of boys did it."

Then he proceeded to tell us about the Americans.

"To begin with, I had a slap in the face. Knowing I should be gone at directly I landed, I had carefully put my best suit of clothes on the top of my portmanteau to be ready for the inevitable interviewers, and what do you think? The rats on board had somehow or other forced their way in, and the clothes were in a fine mess, quite unwearable. It was disgusting; but as there was no help for it, I went straight to a tailor, who produced some reach-me-downs, and in these I had to present myself to my first newspaper fiend.

"The next day I looked eagerly to see what scathing remark they had elicited, but imagine my relief to read, 'Mr. Collins is a small man, but well made and very well dressed.'

"*Very well dressed!* The only solution of the problem that presented itself was that the atrocious garments had a Yankee cut, and thereafter I wore them boldly."

"You had a lot of interviewing to go through of course?" said Mary's husband. "Even we did not escape when we went over a few years ago."

"They pursued me everywhere. One day I went to make a call at a quiet house, not at all a house where publicity is courted, and had hardly sat down when the door opened and in came a lady, little black bag in one hand and her card in the other. Could she have a few minutes' conversation; she was the representative of some paper or other, I forget which. It was too bad; I turned to my hostess to apologise for the impertinence, thinking she would resent it as I did, and she was actually laughing! And she implored me not to disappoint the poor, hungry lady. 'Remember, it is her daily bread,' she murmured in my ear.

"After that I made a determined effort to get my interviewers to come in batches," continued Mr. Collins, "and one day went back to the hotel to find twelve feminine editors of journals large and small, seated in a circle, waiting my return!

"They seemed to have formed a sort of alliance, for no sooner had I made my bow than the oldest and ugliest of them stood forth and solemnly observing, 'Let me embrace you for the company,' offered me a chaste salute.

"However much I might have appreciated the same from a youthful beauty, I did not exactly court a repetition of it thus bestowed, and next day there were very moderate praises of my personal charms in consequence. I suppose

I did look grim, for I felt it. Really, they were not attractive,—" he wound up reflectively.

Otherwise he owned to having much enjoyed his stay in the New World, and though he found himself torn in bits by the hospitality and loquacity which overwhelmed him at every turn, it was, he said, something to look back upon.

"We also felt that, I think," said Mary. "America takes one's breath away, but in the retrospect none of us but looks tenderly back upon it. I shall go there again some day." (And she did, and I went with her—but that was years afterwards.)

"One thing was splendid," continued Mr. Collins, starting afresh, "the climate suited me down to the ground. I had heard so much about the dryness of the atmosphere and its effect upon English people that I did not know what to expect. But I never was better in my life; I did not have an ache or a pain all the time. As for gout, it left me entirely for the time being, and you know how much I usually suffer from it. Oh, I shall certainly crack up America as *the* place for sufferers from rheumatic gout;—and whatever else I can say in its favour I will, for a kinder, warmer-hearted set of people surely does not exist, only their ways *are* queer,—" he smiled a little and enlarged.

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"Did you see the portraits of the signers of 'The Declaration of Independence'?" asked Mary. "I had a copy of the paper they were in sent me lately, and showed it to a Mr. Stewart, who told me that his father-in-law, Professor Graham of Harvard, had written a history of the time."

"Stewart? I met him. I know I met him—but I cannot for the life of me remember where, or what he was like," said Mr. Collins.

"Did he tell you his curious experience at Constantinople, where he was an attaché in 1837, forty years ago?"

"I—I believe he did," faltered Mr. Collins; "I have a vague flickering sensation of his having done so, but upon my word so much went in at one ear and out of the other during my frantic rush out there, that I should be very glad if you would recall it to me."

"Listen, then," said Mary. "Mr. Stewart obtained a year's leave of absence from Constantinople, and having a curious taste in such matters, thought it would be a nice way of spending a holiday to take part in the little war going on between the Russians and Circassians. He helped the Circassians of course, and had command of a large body of men. As he could not speak all the languages he needed, he also had an interpreter. One day he did not like the look of the interpreter. He took a 'Scunner' at him. Do you know what a 'Scunner' is?"

Mr. Collins did not, but the rest of us did, and speedily enlightened him. "'Scunner.' Oh, delightful word!" murmured he.

"Well, he acted upon it," continued Mary, "and packed the man off, despite his earnest entreaties to be allowed to stay. 'I really had no fault to find with him, and could give no reason for dismissing him, but I had a "Scunner," and that's enough for us Scotch folk,' said Mr. Stewart. "You will see when you hear the rest what a valuable safeguard a 'Scunner' is. Nineteen years afterwards I met a Russian General at Pau, and as we were friendly and took walks together, we talked about that war, and he wondered how I knew so much about it? I replied that I had been in the thick of it for a year.

After staring a moment, he said abruptly, "So? Then, you are the Englishman whose letters we opened, and I had to translate them?"

"Very likely," said Mr. Stewart, laughing. "And that explains how they never reached their destination!" Presently he appended, "Did you know anything of our interpreter? I had a very good interpreter, but took a fancy that he was not 'Straight' with me, and dismissed him."

"You thought him dishonest?"

"Not dishonest, but untrustworthy. And yet I could never catch him in any evil practices; it was merely an instinct that I had."

The general smiled. "It was a pretty correct instinct. That man was in our pay. He was our consul at the time you engaged him, and was ordered to leave his post, enter your service, and act as our spy."

"But when I had exclaimed, and would fain have heard more," continued Mr. Stewart, "I found my general not communicative. He seemed to think he had been indiscreet enough, and dried up. However, I had learned what I chiefly wished to know, and registered it in my mind never at any time to disregard the warning of a 'Scunner'!"

As Mr. Collins went away I heard him again murmur under his breath, "'*Scunner.*' A delightful word!"

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But before the party broke up, Mary gave us a little account of her travels in Russia the previous year, of which I remember some items.

"They have an odd fashion," she said, "at least we thought it odd, of talking to you through their noses if they do not think much of you. As we were not Grand Dukes and Duchesses, we were usually treated to this subtle slight. I noticed it, but did not think that it meant anything, and only supposed that the speakers were afflicted with snuffling colds, or adenoids in the throat, or some such ailment.

"But one day at Moscow we noticed that a much-bedizened general, who had been civil enough to our party, but snuffled like the rest when in conversation, suddenly dropped the disagreeable habit, and spoke as clearly as any of ourselves. Then it dawned on me that there might be some meaning in this, and I asked the English friends with whom we were staying if it were so? They were residents, and from long experience knew Russian people in and out.

"'Yes, you are right,' said they. 'Did you notice exactly when the general began to address you with greater respect?'

"'With greater respect?' said John. 'It was meant for disrespect, then, that snuffle?'

"'It was. Undoubtedly it was; and I just let drop something to show *who* you were. Did you notice that?'

No, we had not.

"'But I did,' laughed our friend, 'and the effect was electrical. Before then he had supposed you were—well, nobodies, as he considers nobodies. You had no great retinue; you did not swagger about knowing princes and archdukes, consequently he thought nothing of you, for he is a snob of the first water. It is only when he addresses a person of importance that he allows himself to speak clearly. You will see that he does not snuffle to you again.'

"But I think he had an occasional lapse," said Mary, gaily, "and to the end he never seemed to be quite sure whether we were entitled to be snuffleless or not!"

"Another thing that I noticed was still more curious. The depths of the obeisances made by the ladies in church appear to be regulated by their birth and status."

We heard it said of one lady of quality that she bowed very slightly during Divine Service, "as befitted a person of her rank,"—and as we went to a number of churches in St. Petersburg, we had an opportunity of judging if there were any truth in this.

Well, there might have been. We found it difficult to say. Certainly at the church of St. Isaac, where the congregation was almost entirely composed of the lower orders, they were extraordinarily reverent, prostrating themselves so low as almost to touch the ground.

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"On our homeward way," said Mary, after we had discussed the question, "we stopped at Rigi Carlsbad, where we fell in with our friends Dean Stanley and Mr. Victor Williamson, who were travelling together ; and on Sunday morning Mr. Williamson looked in on us to say the dean was going to hold a service, as there was no resident clergyman in the place. The service was to be in our hotel, and we returned from a morning walk in good time for it.

From our windows we saw the dean and Mr. Williamson approach a little later, and descended, expecting to find them in the room prepared for the occasion,—but although it quickly filled, indeed was soon full to overflowing, no dean appeared.

We waited, and waited, and watches were pulled out, and there was a general fanning and fidgetting—and some, I think, left the hall. A lady near us declared she would have to go, and wishing to avoid notice, opened a side-door, intending to slip out unobserved. Imagine her amazement at finding herself confronted by no less a person than Dean Stanley himself!

He had been shown into a large, empty room, and left there. Supposing this was to be the scene of his ministrations, he had waited and wondered, but it had never occurred to him to ring the bell and make inquiries, and Mr. Williamson had left him in order to post some letters. As the lady however returned bringing her dean with her, no one but ourselves ever knew that he had not from the first proposed to make his belated entrance from that quarter.

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"At dinner that day," continued Mary, "a girl who had been somewhere else to church—or chapel—observed to me: 'We were a curious lot at our place. Mother is Low Church, father is High, I am Broad, and the Macdonalds are Presbyterians—and that was the whole congregation!'

"And a very good congregation too," said Mr. Wilkie Collins, as he rose to go.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Coventry Patmore sends up his card—"The Baby's Grandmother" is left in the lurch, while I fly to welcome "The Angel in the House"—Mr. Patmore thinks the twentieth century will revel in the novels of the nineteenth—He tells how the idea for his famous poem came to him—An anecdote of Darwin—His cook thinks her master too idle—Mr. Patmore's horror of fads—His affection for card-playing—And misplaced belief in himself as a gambler—Mr. "Cavendish" Jones fêted in a banquet-hall papered with playing-cards!

I WAS at work in my study one wet afternoon in July, when something happened upon which I never can look back without a thrill of the pleasure it gave me at the time.

I had no business to be writing at that hour, it was against all rules—but "The Baby's Grandmother" was drawing to a close, and a long, empty day, with Mary out of Town, tempted me beyond endurance.

Other interruptions I could secure myself against, other people I could bar out, but Mary would have walked in and caught me red-handed, and there would have been the—ahem! to pay.

Consequently I fell. The hours flew, not a sound escaped from school-room or nursery—(both full by this time)—and the final scene between my hero and heroine had reached its climax when the door opened and a maid entered bearing a card upon a tray.

A man, I think, would have sworn. A woman being denied that privilege, looked daggers at the maid.

She was an underling whose superior was off duty, and she had either forgotten or misunderstood her instructions.

"The gentleman is in the drawing-room," she announced, cheerfully.

How abominable, how detestable, is such cheerfulness! How it aggravates the cruelty of the blow and intensifies the misery of the victim! And my misery could have no real vent. I could not even say, "Wretched girl, go and hang yourself";—and an indignant, "Had you not orders to admit no one?"—fell flat.

But the next instant my eye fell upon the card, and I bounded to my feet. Even "Lady Matilda" and her lover could wait; it would do them no harm to stare and gasp at each other a little longer while I—oh, I flew on the wings of the wind to meet the author of "The Angel in the House"!

What hours of delight it had given me in days of yore! What passages I could still repeat—(I can repeat them now!—). How I adored "Honoria" and "Frederick," and wondered if he were not still more adorable than "Vaughan"?

I was yet in my teens when "The Angel in the House" came my way, it having indeed been out a considerable time—(it was published, I think, in 1854)—but had only by slow degrees won its way into public favour. However, the "Lovely daughters of the Dean" were at length winning recognition far and wide, and were nowhere more upheld as models of what fair maidenhood ought to be than in my home.

My feelings then may be guessed when I read on the card held out by a blundering servant the magic syllables "Mr. Coventry Patmore."

A few weeks before there had appeared in the "St. James' Gazette" an article on novels, in which my own were most kindly dealt with, and the value of this was enhanced by its being signed, "Coventry Patmore,"—but I had no acquaintance with the poet, who was then living at Hastings, and seldom came to London. He had of himself sought and found me. How proud and happy I felt!

"I wrote for your address to John Blackwood," said he, "and hope you will forgive the intrusion?" And a thin, old hand which yet had a wonderful touch, clasped mine.

Afterwards I found that Mr. Patmore was nothing like as old as he looked; but he was so spare of frame, and had such a fragile, colourless face that, born and bred among hardy Highlanders who as men between fifty and sixty were full of robust vigour, I mentally added years to his score.

Can I describe him? Only by saying he had the countenance of a poet, the irregular outline of feature, the thoughtful yet luminous eyes, the firm yet mobile mouth,—while a mass of silky, wavy hair clustered round the low, placid brow, and was, I took note, carefully brushed out. *N.B.* I fancy that the beautiful hair was a secret source of vanity, and why not? May we not have our little vanities if we choose?

Mr. Patmore's manner had the charm of perfect simplicity and courtesy. He had an *engaging* manner.

If a pun be permissible, I should say it went far towards an explanation of his having been engaged—and married—so often. A man does not obtain three wives for nothing. Three wives, too, who, report said, were all well worthy of being thus mated, and the only criticism I ever heard passed on the subject was that of his little son, who succinctly observed, "Father, you are just half a Henry the Eighth!"

To return. Mr. Patmore seemed very well pleased at finding a quiet room and a warm welcome, and subsided into an arm-chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I was afraid I should find a room full of gay folks," he said. "I know what it usually means when you make a call in London. You can't get a word with your hostess, except when she introduces you to her friends, hoping you will take them off her hands. Now, isn't that true?"

"True? Yes, *sometimes* true," I confessed, "but not always. Sometimes, of course."

"The tide flows in," said Mr. Patmore, in a gentle, sociable way, "but I thought there was a chance of catching it on the ebb on a wet day; and if you are not busy, I should like to stay a little."

He then owned that he had come up to London "Almost on purpose" for this, and that he was tired, and a trifle damp, and would like a cup of tea very much. In half-an-hour we were talking as if we had known each other all our lives.

"You must know that I love novels," began my new friend, with a tea-cup in one hand and a slice of bread-and-butter in the other—his red Bandana handkerchief he had spread upon his knee, for what purpose I was at a loss to understand. "The novels of the present day are so good that I am always being tempted by them. This century will be known by its novels. The life of the present day will be by them handed down to posterity with wonderful truth and skill. The twentieth century will revel in the pen-portraiture of the nineteenth."

(Ah, me! How ironical this sounds now! How absolutely has such a prophecy been disproved! The twentieth century revel in the novels of the nineteenth? Good heavens, *revel*? Do they even *tolerate* it? Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May we not wallow in—but no matter.)

If it pleased my gifted companion to think as he did, it was not for me to demur; and letting alone the greatest names of all, we discussed Hardy and Meredith, Kingsley and Blackmore, Mrs. Oliphant, Miss Braddon and Miss Broughton with much unanimity of opinion.

I remember rejoicing to find that he did not despise

Anthony Trollope. It was even then beginning to be the fashion to hold that writer cheap. His style was said to be wearisome, he rambled round and round the main thread of his story, and could not, do what he would, produce a "Love interest."

There was some truth in this, but, on the other hand, what an assemblage of life-like portraits are gathered together in the "Chronicles of Barset"! Has there ever been a second "Mrs. Proudie"? Do we not see the stately "Archdeacon Grantly" vowing to himself that never again will he "touch the paw of that impure and filthy animal, Mr. Slope"?

I could have dilated on the simple and saintly Mr. Harding, on the embittered yet high-minded Mr. Crawley, on Lucy Robarts, and a host of others—(to this day I meet these old friends with a kind of quiet joy; they are so human, so natural, and trouble one so little with suggestive utterances and unpleasant insinuations)—but though Mr. Patmore took kindly to Trollope, and even owned to a sneaking affection for Jorrocks, he wanted, I think, to talk about a person still more interesting to himself, and I was only too happy to have him do so. "Let me tell you a little about 'The Angel,'" he said.

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"Shall I tell how the idea for it first came to me? But no, I can't do that, for I don't myself know how, or when—it seemed to have been always there. I was a reflective boy, always mooning and dreaming, and I read a lot of poetry—perhaps it would have been better if I had not.

"And what grew upon me was the conviction that though poets from all time had sung of love, the object of the love was always the Siren woman, or the Fairy woman, or some lovely creature of that kind—but not the woman *as* woman—not the Inspirer and Beautifier of daily life, not the Presiding Deity of the Home.

"That was what I longed to depict, and all at once I felt the power to do it.

"I had been laid low, very low, by an illness; but when the illness left me a strange new spring of life seemed bursting into flower within my breast. I felt that I *must* write, and that I *could*. It was a wonderful feeling.

"In six weeks I had completed the first book of the poem, calling it 'The Betrothal.' I was on fire all the time—could neither eat, sleep, nor think of anything else. Do you know that feeling?"

I thought, humbly, that I did.

"You must, I am sure. It is only when one does *that* that one really writes, and succeeds. But do you know, though I thought I had succeeded, and some said I had, when the poem was published it brought me at first only bitter disappointment."

"*Oh!*"

"It did. You are kind enough to say it gave you some pleasure—thank you, thank you,"—a pleased look stole over his face, and even a little colour suffused his cheek,—"but it received no compliments from the reviewers, I can tell you. Perhaps I had adopted a ridiculous metre. To me it seemed to suit the theme, but some of my friends seemed to think that its 'Easy simplicity'—those were their words—made people fancy it was hardly to be taken seriously. They preferred the intricate, elaborate form of verse; they wanted something complex—at least that was what my comforters suggested.

"It might be so, but anyhow 'The Angel' did not go down.

"Then I was accused of self-portraiture. Now I had done my very best to avoid this by placing 'Frederick'—

said to be myself—in a position I had never occupied. I had never had the love of my life rejected."

("Nor three loves of your life," thought I, thinking of the Henry the Eighth resemblance.)

"So that it was rather hard to be condemned for drawing on my own experience," continued Mr. Patmore, "though after all, what did that matter? What galled me was the lack of public appreciation—no, I won't be grandiloquent, it was the poorness of the sales! Not all the applause of my friends and brother-poets could compensate for *that*. Tennyson called it 'An immortal poem.' Ruskin wrote that it would be 'One of the most popular books of the English language, and *blessedly* popular, doing good wherever it went.' And Browning endorsed this sentiment, while qualifying it by adding, 'I do not say that it will be now, nor soon, but sometime or other.' Carlyle—but I really can't tell you all that Carlyle said, is it not written in the Book of the Chronicles of my heart?

"So you see I had it ding-dong from all the critics I cared most about, but, bless me, what does that go for when a book *won't sell*? May I smoke?"

So sharp was the transition of tone that I started. He had been fidgetting in his chair for some ten minutes back, but it had not occurred to me that he missed his cigarette, and I suppose the excitement raised by these memories of the past intensified the craving to a pitch which could not be borne.

I suggested the smoking-room, but the old man looked pitifully at the fire. He was warm and comfortable, and visitors were not to be admitted; I cheerfully bade him sit still and light up.

"My daughters roll my cigarettes for me," said he. "I am a fearful smoker. I know it is all wrong, and I should be better if I could keep to half-a-dozen or so a day—but I can't. All we poets smoke," he folded his hands and puffed away, while my thoughts flew to the still greater poet who had been turned out of the Plymouth lady's virgin dwelling for his determination to "Raŭchen."

I told Mr. Patmore the story.

"Aye, that's Tennyson all the world over," said he; "he is a worse offender even than I; he has a pipe in his mouth all day long."

I then begged to be told when the tide turned as regarded "The Angel in the House"?

"Oh, as soon as the latter part appeared, it began to be better liked by the populace.

"You see, the book came out in instalments—and it was the first instalment that failed to 'Catch on.' After that I was all right.

"But I never really finished 'The Angel'—at least, I don't feel as if I did. I had often things in my mind which I would have brought out in the later life of 'Felix' and 'Honoria' if I could have *got at* them again—but I never could. I tried altering the scheme and metre as you know, and wrote 'The Wedding Sermon' part in a series of letters, but I don't know if the change was altogether wise?" He looked pensively into the fire. "I did take advice; I was always taking advice—do you take advice?" he broke off suddenly.

Now, the only advice I ever had was from my prince of publishers John Blackwood, and his advice was, "Never take advice!"

This pleased Mr. Patmore, who repeated it to himself with unction, adding that for his own part he was too fond of consulting his friends and discussing his writings with them when in manuscript.

When I told him that no eye ever saw mine and no ear ever heard them till they were in print, he turned his head slowly round and looked at me.

"What about your husband?" said he, after a pause.

"He is too much my husband; he cannot be my critic. He simply sees and hears *me* in it all. By his own wish he first reads my books when they are in print."

"That's splendid," said Mr. Patmore, thoughtfully.

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"I am dreadfully idle, I am an idler born," he resumed; "but then I believe in a poet's idleness. Idleness is the growing-time of his harvest, and the upcome of a year can be reaped in one fine day."

"That reminds me of Mr. Darwin and his cook," said I. "Did you ever hear the story?"

"Darwin? What Darwin? *The* Darwin? No; pray tell it me."

"Do you know anything of him?"

"Only what the world does. I have no personal knowledge."

"Nor have I, but Mrs. Darwin told in my hearing a story of her husband which bears on your remark about idleness. She said she was consulting her cook as to any means of tempting her master's appetite, which was a very poor one. 'He does not seem to fancy ordinary food,' she said. 'Try to think of something.'

"The cook looked up, and looked down, and twirled her apron. 'If you'll excuse the liberty I'm taking, ma'am, I should say that master would be able to take his food better if he got *something to do.* Idle folks is never hungry.'

"'But your master is not an idle man,' protested Mrs. Darwin, indignant at such a charge. 'He is *never* idle. In my opinion, he works *too hard.*'

"'Excuse me, ma'am,' replied the cook, 'but if I may make so bold as to say so, I can't agree to that. With my own eyes I see him in the garden yesterday sitting staring at a leaf for over two hours! Two whole hours! Well, *that* ain't work, anyhow.'"

"Oh, delightful—delightful," Mr. Patmore lay back in his chair to enjoy the joke to the full. "Darwin staring for two mortal hours at a leaf—that marvellous brain of his working like mad all the while—and a slut who didn't know what a brain was turning up her nose at him for idleness! That two hours' growing-time produced—what did it not produce? A chapter perhaps that the world will not willingly let die."

He paused, with an arch look. "I daresay my servants jeer at me among themselves. They, the present ones at any rate, never see me at work. And even when I did work, when I was in full tide, the real work was not the writing down, as you can believe. And it was going on at any time and all times, generally out-of-doors. I remember once a sudden inspiration coming to me, and afraid of not catching it on the wing, I applied to a daughter for a scrap of paper. We were out walking together, and far afield.

"She had nothing; not even a letter nor an envelope—but she is fertile of resource; she whipped off the linen cuff of her sleeve, and I scribbled my three or four lines upon it!"

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He owned to having mischievous fits. He did like occasionally to shock people, and see how much they would swallow? Their long, puzzled, bewildered faces refreshed his soul.

"And of all good folks I detest *faddists*," said he. "Vegetarians, humanitarians, anti-tobacconists, and teetotalers—all that humbuggy, sentimental gang. Of course if there is a *reason* for teetotalism, if a man can't take his glass of wine or beer without taking it to excess, well and good; but—what?"

I ventured to suggest that there were cases in which we ought to bear one another's burdens.

"Hum. I don't know about that," said he, briskly. "Do you think it really helps a drunkard to see you drinking water and hating it?"

"I think it may help him if everything but water is kept out of his sight."

"Are you a teetotaler?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Not at all—in theory. In practice, partly so. But in the Celtic blood, Mr. Patmore, there is a love of strong drink which I believe to be almost ineradicable. It has to be fought against by all who have that blood in their veins. We love drink—"

"Not *you?*" He looked, as he could not help looking, startled; I meant to startle him.

"I am speaking for my race," I said, "the Highland race, that perhaps you don't take into account? Whiskey might be a blessing to them—"

"—Aye, I understand that. Cold, wet country."

"And the poor among them are very poor, and whiskey is cheap. And many of them are in wet clothes all day long, and chilled to the bone when the wind is cold."

"Why now, you are backing me up!" cried he.

"That's their temptation," said I, gravely, "and the ruin of many a noble soul. I have seen it, I have known it from my youth up. I never want to laugh at the story of a 'Fou' man. It may be funny, but underneath is the awful truth. God forgive whiskey-distillers, for they will have much to answer for one day."

Mr. Patmore frowned thoughtfully.

After a pause, he looked up and said, "I don't see that, you know. It is not the fault of the whiskey-provider that drunkards flourish. He doesn't *make* them drink. All his business is to see that the stuff is good. The same with beer. Johnson, for example, the great Johnson, the good man and moralist, thought highly of Thrale the brewer. I am not sure he did not say that it was a

'Glorious trade.' Certainly he described with zest the vats and barrels."

We might have argued forever, but I was no hand at an argument, and was satisfied that an impression had been made when my companion remained silent for some minutes, and then said, "But of course if the love of drink is in the blood as you say, it might be different. I know nothing of the Scottish people."

"But I *do* say down with all white-livered nonsense," he resumed presently. "There are people whose sentimental vagaries make me sick,—" and he ran on in such vigorous language that I had to call to mind what he himself had said of his "Mischievous fits" before being able to laugh with him.

"I don't mean the half of all that," he said at last.

"You don't mean the quarter," said I.

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"I am a terrible gambler," was another of Mr. Coventry Patmore's pet delusions. "I love every form of play, and I play to win. I am tremendously lucky. Do you play whist?"

"Very badly, but my husband is a good player, and *his* father a noted one. He taught me all I know—but you may judge what that amounts to when you hear that the very last time I played with him he sat forward in his chair with pink cheeks and blazing eyes, saying, 'Child, you don't know the very rudiments of the game!'"

"Not over polite, that?"

"He was the most uniformly polite man I ever knew. He was simply transported out of himself by my awful play."

"Well, I can understand that," rejoined Mr. Patmore, complacently. "It is a thing to make a saint swear when a partner trumps your best card. I am very particular about my partners."

Afterwards I heard that it was the partners who had occasion to swear in secret. They confided that Mr. Coventry Patmore was so delightful in himself that they endured his whist for the sake of his company. His whist was execrable. He defied all rules and conventions; he played entirely off his own bat, often without the slightest reference to any one else's hand, and made the most glaring mistakes with absolute unconsciousness. However as there was no one to betray this on the present occasion, he could pat himself on the back unrestrained.

He was interested in hearing about the great whist authority, Jones, or "Cavendish," as he styled himself, whose sister I had met in the Riviera the year before, and who was courted for the whist-tables at the Hotel National, Mentone, where we were both staying.

She was a most cheerful, kindly person, and always ready to talk about "My brother."

My brother! How one knows what that means, and with what loving pride the words are spoken. The Bishop, the Judge, the Cabinet Minister, the Field-Marshal, the Admiral-of-the-Fleet—he is simply "My brother" to his worshipping relations at home. Mr. "Cavendish" Jones was "My brother" to the adoring little spinster at the Hotel National.

When "My brother" went on his grand tour round the world it appeared that it gave rise to the most extraordinary and extravagant testimonials to his fame as a whist-player. One hall where a dinner was held in his honour, "And all the big-wigs were there," added Miss Jones, "was entirely papered with playing-cards!"

The menu was composed of certain moves in the game; and the table-cloth and dinner-napkins were woven on purpose with kings, queens, and knaves in picturesque groups. "My brother said the effect was extraordinary," concluded she, "but certainly very flattering."

"Did you play with her?" inquired Mr. Patmore, with interest.

"We all played with her; she was so good-natured as to despise nobody, and even experts would cheerfully take a hand at her table. They said her play was a treat."

"And one day she proposed giving me a lesson during a walk we took together," continued I, "and she took the greatest pains, suggesting problems and working them out for my benefit, and I was very greatly obliged and knew just as much at the end of the walk as at the beginning! But, Mr. Patmore, did you ever hear of a game called 'Suit-placing'?"

No, he never had.

"Miss Jones offered to teach it to several of us one wet day, and we had out the card-table in a trice. She dealt, and instructed us to open the game and play in the usual fashion. Then all at once after a few tricks had been taken, "Stop, everybody!" she cried, "and lay your cards face downwards on the table. Now," she turned to her left-hand opponent, "Now, place the cards."

"Place them?" said he—it was a man who spoke.

"Say where the cards are? In whose hand? At this point of the game you ought to be able to tell with confidence where every important card lies."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed he.

("And I say 'Oh, Lord!' too," interrupted Mr. Patmore.)

"The poor man had an idea of one or two," continued I, "but made an utter hash of the rest."

"Still, that's not bad for a beginner," said Miss Jones, "for a beginner, mind. You ought to have been able to do better; as it happens, they are easy to know about in the present instance—but it was really not bad. Now for the next turn." And we all had to try, and scarcely one got beyond what the first had done—while our instructress simply reeled them off, having them all at her finger ends! She said that her father invented that method of improving whist-play in his family, and it was practised nightly among them."

"What a diabolical game!" said Mr. Patmore.

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At last he had to go. But before he went he extorted a promise that my husband and I would visit him in his new home, and as it was within easy distance of Eastbourne, where we had taken a house for the summer, we gladly went.

Never afterwards, however, did the old poet show himself to quite such advantage as during that first interview. Poets are rarely at their best with family eyes and ears upon them.

Mr. Patmore did indeed come over to us and sat on the rocks below Beachy Head, but he had "Piffie" with him, and "Piffie," a delicate little six-year-old child, the son of his old age, had to be guarded from falling into the water, and from taking cold, and from overheating himself, and in short, the poor little fellow was such a nuisance that we all wished him anywhere but where he was.

A daughter also invariably dogged her father's footsteps on such occasions.

On the whole, we came to the conclusion that to enjoy the full flavour of his society we must extract the dear old recluse from his surroundings. We invited him to spend one Easter with us at our Essex home, and he agreed to come but did not.

For he died instead. That was in 1896.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Oscar Wilde's frank aunt—Lady Delarey's ultimatum—Walter Savage Landor—Criticises Michael Angelo, Milton, Dante, and Carlyle—A new use for Lord Vivian's nose—A poor madman in Worcester Cathedral—He laid his head upon her knee—Mr. Sam Warren outwitted—"Warren's Blacking"—An awkward father-in-law—"I may tell you that I have married *the daughter of the Devil*"—Professional beauties in the Row—Canon Liddon and the Maori chiefs.

We went to see the Burdon-Sandersons, and there was that dreadful girl again!

They cannot shake her off. As they knew her parents, who are both dead—died of having such a child, I should think—they seem to feel it a duty to keep their door open to her, and she plumes herself on bringing in "A breath of purer air into their musty, scientific atmosphere."

As usual, she was soon in full tide about Oscar Wilde who had just returned from America, where according to his disciple the whole world had fallen at his feet.

"Now let us go and see the aunt, and hear how much or how little we may believe of all this," said Mary, as we drove away. "*She* won't mince matters; her remarks are always so piquant that I can stand any amount of Oscar from her—but that girl is too much for me. Her complacent conviction that we are all eyeing her with awe and envy because of this transcendent friendship—I wonder, by the way, how Oscar looks upon it? Those sort of friendships are often lop-sided,—" and she gave me a shrewd look.

We found the aunt at home, and as plain-spoken as ever.

"Oscar has been making a very big fool of himself. I always knew my nephew could look after his own interests, but I did not think he would be caught at it. What do you think is his last achievement? He was asked to dinner a few nights ago by a rather important lady of his acquaintance, one he thinks a good deal of, and he was quite glad to accept the invitation.

"But presently he had a new invitation of a still more tempting nature, and what does the silly fellow do but accept it likewise, trusting to his power of lying to pull him through? He has, you know, a wonderful gift for mendacity. What he did was to write to Lady Delarey that he was grieved to be unable to keep his engagement, but found he had to *go North* that evening.

"As the dinner-party was to be a small one, and was solely got up for him, Lady Delarey put off her other guests and herself accepted the very invitation to dine in Regent's Park which had tempted Oscar to break faith with her.

"I ought to have told you that Mr. Browning was to be present at this latter party, and of course that *was* rather a bait as he is so seldom to be had, and Oscar had long wished to meet him. Perhaps Lady Delarey had too?

"Anyhow the two poets were in full flow of conversation, and Oscar no doubt getting out his horns finely when the door was flung open and her ladyship was announced!

"The hostess was at hand—(it was she who told me about it)—and she said Oscar's look of dismay caused Mr. Browning to stop dead in what he was saying. Every eye was upon them, the little group near the door,—and Lady Delarey's face also was a sight to see.

"She went straight for my nephew, and gave it him equally 'Straight.' 'Mr. Wilde! So *this* it what you call "Going North"? I understand. I shall never speak to you again.'

"And she never will," continued Oscar's unkind relation with so evident a chuckle that we felt we might join in it.

"Did he try to soften her?" inquired Mary.

"He might try. He won't succeed. Oh, yes, I believe he did try; Oscar thinks he has great persuasive powers, but I know Lady Delarey, and now that she has found him out he has done for himself with her. If it had happened to anyone else an excuse might have been found in his great desire to meet a brother-poet, etc.—but who can forgive a slight to oneself? Not Lady Delarey certainly."

"I had a visit from Oscar afterwards," resumed she, "but I had to affect ignorance of the affair, for I have a kind of sneaking affection for the fellow at bottom—though I detest him at top—and don't care to quarrel. So I talked to him about America."

"I suppose he had a great time there?" said Mary.

"No doubt. But he seemed rather doubtful as to one so-called compliment paid him.

"He delivered a lecture in Boston, and when he mounted the platform, behold there were seated in the front rows sixty young students from Harvard University, all wearing knee-breeches and black silk stockings, and each with a huge sunflower in his button-hole! He was told this was to be taken as a flattering testimonial to his tastes, but felt, as I said, a little dubious on the subject and affected to laugh at it. I more than half suspect he wanted me to reassure him."

We then talked of the girl at the Sandersons.

"Oh, that odiosity?" said the aunt, "now I really do pity Oscar about her. Of course he is accustomed to the absurd worship of such simpletons, but she transcends them all, and though he is too clever to make an enemy of anyone who sings his praises, I know he wishes her at the other end of the earth."

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"I have just had a visitor of another sort," continued our friend—"Walter Savage Landor. I met him lately at Archdeacon Hare's, and it was very amusing.

"When I came home I jotted down some of their conversation, if conversation it can be called. Here it is," and she rummaged in a drawer. "I must say," continued she, rummaging next for her spectacles and unfolding a strip of paper, "I must say that the archdeacon was mild enough, and quite polite and pleasant as he always is, but Mr. Landor is a perfect savage,—one would think his parents had possessed the gift of prophecy when bestowing that name upon him!

"He struck out with both arms—well, I mean with his tongue—he simply lashed out against every famous man whom the poor archdeacon—a very scholarly man, my dears—introduced into their talk.

"Now listen," and she held open her paper, but paused to say by way of preface, "It began with Michael Angelo. One would think Michael Angelo had been long enough dead, and besides was sufficiently out of Mr. Landor's line, to have escaped animadversion, but no. 'Michael Angelo? Pooh! The only well-drawn figure in existence is a small female by Overbec, in his picture of "Children brought to Jesus Christ." As for your Michael Angelo—pooh!'

"Then here. 'Milton wrote *one* good line, but I forget which it was.'

"And here. 'Dante wrote perhaps *six* good lines. They were in his description of Francesca.'

"And here. 'Carlyle's "French Revolution" is a wicked book. I have worn out one volume with tossing it on to the floor whenever I came upon an abominable passage.'

"A man who can fling himself against such giants, and expect you to take such rubbish for gospel is hardly sane—and yet I had to receive this lunatic to-day at my own house, and found him quite pleasant too," she wound up laughing; "I suppose he did not consider me worth powder and shot."

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"Talking of lunatics," said Mary, "did I ever tell you about Lord Vivian and the lunatic at Bournemouth?

"We had a house at Bournemouth last summer, and Lord Vivian had one next to it. One day he set off with a friend on a trip to Cornwall, and the two went over a lunatic asylum there. In the garden they came upon a man pulling cherries, and stood still a moment to watch him.

"The man took a long look at Lord Vivian's great Roman nose, and with his eyes fixed upon it, observed sagely; 'It would be easier for you to pull cherries than for me; you could pull twice as many.'

"'Could I?' said Lord Vivian, drawing him on, 'how do you make that out?'

"'I'll tell you,' said the other; 'you see, I have to hold on with one hand and pull cherries with the other; but you could hold on with your nose and pull cherries with both hands!'

"Lord Vivian was so much diverted by this ingenious idea, and so little perturbed by the affront to his nose, that he went about everywhere telling the story."

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As soon as we had left the house, I observed to Mary that I had heard another story of a lunatic shortly before which was too long to repeat at a morning call, but that she should have it now we were alone.

"A young lady," I said, "living at Worcester, was called out one evening to see a sick friend in the Cathedral Close, and warned her family that she might stay out all night, if wanted; so that they were not to be alarmed if she did not return."

"It's always foolish to leave things at that," interposed Mary. "Do you remember Mr. Walter Jones, and his friends immured in the British Museum?"

"This poor girl any way didn't, and very likely had never heard of them. Do you want to hear my story or not?" said I, tartly. One does not like to be tripped up thus early in the day.

"Oh, I want your story—get on with your story."

Accordingly, I got on.

"Having thus comfortably settled the matter, off went the girl; and finding her friend better, and provided with a nurse, thought she might as well return home. Her nearest way led through the Cathedral. She was in the middle of the nave, when she heard the great West door shut behind her, and rushed to a nearer one, only to find it also closed. She saw at once that she would have to spend the night where she was, as owing to her own precautions, no one would seek her."

"As I said,"—began Mary.

But I pretended not to hear, and went on. "Being of a tolerably phlegmatic temperament, she resigned herself to the inevitable, found a cushioned pew, and tried to go to sleep. But just as she was dropping off she was startled to behold the figure of a man stealing out into the gloom, and coming towards her.

"He was waving his arms about; and as soon as she could see his face, which was wild and haggard, she guessed the truth. A lunatic had escaped from the Worcester Asylum a few days before, and this was he!

"A certain amount of relief came to her from the fact that he did not look fierce or malevolent, but had rather a sad, plaintive expression—still it was bad enough to have the poor creature seat himself by her side, and to know that they two were alone together in the vast building. She tried to pull herself together, and it flashed upon her mind that music was said to have a soothing effect upon a disordered brain. She had a lovely voice, and desperation gave her strength to start a song.

"The poor lunatic was delighted. He stroked her hand, he beat time to the tune, and finally he sank down on a hassock at her feet, and laid his head upon her knee.

"She hoped he might fall asleep, but no; as soon as ever the singing ceased, he started up and grew restless; it was only when she recommenced that he quieted down again, humming a soft little echo to himself.

"And this went on all night!

"In the morning, when the Cathedral doors were opened and the verger appeared, she was still singing, but now wove into her song the words, '*Go and get help instantly*,' in piercing accents which at once achieved their purpose without enlightening the lunatic, who was peacefully drowsy though not absolutely asleep.

"He was secured, and no doubt felt that he had passed a delightful night,—but the poor girl was ill for months afterwards, indeed she has only now gone abroad to recruit."

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When Mary had commented on this dreadful experience, she said, "I'll tell you another lunatic story, in lighter vein. You have met Mr. Samuel Warren?"

"'Ten Thousand a Year'? Of course," said I, "don't you remember, years ago, at your house?"

"Well, I had forgotten, and I have not seen him for a long time; but the other day he was just going out of the James Mellors' as I was going in, so it was 'How-d'ye-do?' and 'Good-bye' on the doorstep. The Mellors are always greatly entertained with Sam's airs and graces, having known his people in earlier and humbler days, and they told me what I am going to tell you.

"'Mr. Samuel Warren is quite a great man now,' said Mr. Mellor, giving me an arch look, 'but a lunatic gave him something of a knock the other day, though he had to laugh it off. He is a Commissioner in Lunacy, and one day the lunatic to be examined was long in making his appearance, and Mr. Warren admonished him on the subject.

"'It was not my fault that you had to wait,' retorted the delinquent, 'I had no clothes on, and you would not have liked me to come in like that?'

"'Then why did you tear your clothes?' demanded the Commissioner, eyeing him severely.

"But the other was not to be browbeaten; 'I did not tear them. I tell you, I did not tear them.'

"'You *must* have torn them.'

"'I did not.'

"'Come, my man, this won't do. You must not contradict me like that. Do you know who I am?'

"The man looked at him unconcernedly. 'I know you well enough, and I knew your father before you.'

"At this the Commissioner's brow cleared. 'Knew my father?' said he.

"Now, it is one of Sam Warren's good points that he thinks all the world of his father, and within that very hour had been expatiating to those assembled in the court on the old gentleman's genius and reputation. He glanced round, and took a new tone with the lunatic. 'I am quite interested. You say you knew my father?'

"'Of course I did. He was *the blacking man*.' And as 'Warren's Blacking' was on every hoarding in London, the poor Commissioner's face was a sight not to be forgotten, especially as an audible titter ran round the entire court,' said Mr. Mellor."

"Warren never tells *that* story—but he has another he is fond of relating, and I must say he tells it humorously. A lunatic once said to him, 'I've been married since you were last here, Mr. Warren, and I like my wife very much. But I don't get on with the old people; indeed, I prefer to avoid them. I may as well tell you at once that I have married *the daughter of the Devil.*'"

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"Come, you have written long enough for this morning," cried Mary, running in one lovely day about noon. "Come out—come out. You can crib an hour or two from the afternoon if needs must,—but all the world is astir this glorious May morning, and it is a shame to waste it."

"I am not *wasting* it," said I, trying to be offended.

But of course in the end she prevailed, for I had been up very late the night before—(I call it night, but the milk-carts were dashing past our house long before we entered it; balls were balls in those days, and were kept up to almost any hour)—so that a secret headache echoed the impatient and importunate "Come out."

And what a morning it was, soft as silk and mild as milk, and flowers, flowers, flowers everywhere!

In 1880 there was a line of demarcation between the halcyon days of the London season and the dull, deserted, out-of-season periods which can hardly be imagined by the present generation, and the burst of fresh life and vigour when spring came was a burst indeed.

What bustle, what preparation, what papering and painting and bedecking of window-boxes and balconies!

What rushing about in search of everything at once! What planning, what arranging, what hopes and fears, and oh! what anxiety. How the "Climbers" struggled for a step upward on the social ladder! How the newer "Climbers" jostled the older ones!

But all of this has been so often and so well described that I must not let my pen run on. Only sometimes those old days seem so near and stand out so clear to view, that I can scarce believe it was not yesterday that I saw the crowds in Rotten Row without a motor, even a single motor on any side.

Far, far more of a spectacle did the Row present as it was than as it is. It is true that a few stately equipages and smart little victorias still survive, but do we ever see the highswung, glittering barouche, with its bewigged coachman and powdered footmen in their gorgeous liveries? If Mary and I were now to appear as we turned out on an afternoon, we should be considered *freaks*—and yet there is something missing to-day in fashionable London which brightened up its streets and squares forty years ago.

In the morning of course barouches were not correct, but the light little Tilbury, dog-cart, or pony-carriage was everywhere, and as for the riders, they were endless. The walkers too crowded each other as they paraded up and down, and all were smartly dressed. Occasionally we would join them, it was more amusing than sitting still, and we fell in with more acquaintances.

Besides which a walk in the Row at the proper hour afforded opportunities for giving informal invitations, and when it is remembered that the telephone was not, and the telegram a thing to be sparingly used—and still looked shyly upon by old-fashioned people—it will be seen that the chance of getting an answer on the spot to a "Come to dinner, and meet So-and-So," was not to be despised. But let me return to the bright May morning when I was called from my study to join the gay throngs chattering in the sunlight.

Among the walkers were the beauties Mrs. Wheeler and Mrs. Langtry, while even more beautiful to my mind was the exquisite Lady Kildare, who as Duchess of Leinster was so soon to fade into an early tomb.

I think I have never seen greater loveliness than hers; sweetness of expression joined to perfection of feature, and her bearing most noble and dignified! When at Mentone in the year of her death there, I heard with what courage and resignation she was facing it, and from a dear old lady who was with her almost daily, learned that the end was "Perfect peace."

But leaning back in her carriage that dazzling morning, with no prophetic signs of the terrible illness to come dimming her bright countenance, it was a sight to charm every eye.

Among the men were similarly well-known faces, and we lingered some time, for it was hard to tear ourselves away that day, when so many we knew were putting in an appearance for the first time, and had to be greeted, and their addresses obtained, with all the comments called forth thereby—but it was not until we were about to depart that we fell in with anyone of interest to others than ourselves. Then we chanced on Canon Liddon, making for a short cut.

"Do let me drive you?" said Mary, as he was evidently in a hurry, and we had a little bit of a front seat vacant.

Small as it was, the canon jumped at it. He was late for an appointment and would be most grateful—and he was in, and tucking the linen wrap round his legs before he could finish his sentence.

Then I suppose he felt that he ought to "Earn his keep," for he embarked upon a most amusing little history that lasted until we set him down at his destination—indeed he had to finish it from the pavement. "You heard that I had some Maori chiefs to look after lately? They were a handful, and I really only feel happy to-day, now that they are fairly off the field. Did you hear about them at Marlborough House?"

"We heard *something*," said Mary, laughing. "There was rather a funny scene, wasn't there?"

"Oh, very funny—for those who had no part in it. It was no fun for me. I had charge of the chiefs, and they are a fine set of fellows; and as I really wished to do the best possible for them, I got leave for them to be presented to the Prince and Princess of Wales.

"At first difficulties were made about this and there was some worry before it was agreed to, but ultimately I herded them along and thought the worst was past. They behaved splendidly—at least, they meant to do so. But their ideas are not quite ours—for as we were waiting in the reception room at Marlborough House for the Royal party to appear, what did I catch the principal chief doing? Taking off his boots and stockings! He had got as far as the last stocking before my eye fell upon him!"

"Had you time to get them on again?"—said Mary.

"No, we hadn't. I explained to the poor chief that his notions of respect were not exactly what etiquette prescribed, and all the time I was tugging at his stockings, when, before the boots were on, in came the Prince and Princess, and the Royal children! They tried of course not to laugh, but it was hardly possible to help it. The Prince's lips were trembling, and the children could not contain themselves.

"The Maoris however were so completely taken up with their own grandeur and their own method of procedure that I don't fancy they noticed anything.

"Their interpreter came forward with a flourish, '*He* say he is as glad to see you as if you were his mother,'—and he pointed to the chief who had only one boot on.

"The Prince made a suitable reply, though as I said his lip trembled.

"Then the interpreter proceeded, '*He* say that when he fought for your mother, his cap was all that was left him!'

"The Prince hardly knew how to answer this, and while he was hesitating something else passed between the Maoris and the interpreter said, '*He* say he has got no more to say, and so he'll go now:'—at which we could have cheered. The Prince made fun of me afterwards about it."

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"Was that the last of the chiefs?" asked Mary.

"Well, no," replied Canon Liddon, with a comical twist of his mouth, "to tell you the truth, they turned the joke on me at the last. I thought myself obliged to invite the whole party to dinner, and took some trouble to provide for them what I fancied they would like. At any rate they had all the delicacies of the season. Well, they did that dinner justice in every respect, and I was congratulating myself on its success, when having eaten and drunk, and cleaned their plates in solemn silence, they stood up, and the head chief—the stockings-and-boots-hero,—pronounced one word three times, with ever increasing emphasis.

"Of course I thought it was 'Thank you,—thank you,—thank you,' or its equivalent—but I never was more out in my life. I asked the interpreter with an agreeable smile, expecting a compliment, 'What does the chief say?'

"'He says "*Nasty*,—NASTY,—NASTY."'

"You may guess how nice that was to hear," continued Canon Liddon, laughing heartily, "after all the trouble and expense! I asked if they would have liked anything else better, and learned they would have preferred a large round of beef which they could have gone on eating till it was finished; and that they found it disturbing and unpleasant to have little scraps of things set before them, and also disliked having their plates changed so often. I thought, 'Thank Heaven, I shan't have another chance of giving these rascals a dinner!'"

"And now, I hope you will not have a 'Nasty' luncheon yourself?" said Mary, as we waved hands and parted.

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"It is pleasant to think that there are more grateful guests than those," quoth she, as we trotted away—"those poor women in my district, for instance. You remember that day when I could not go with you to Stafford House because I was giving a tea to my poor women? There was one there who seemed very merry, keeping her end of the table in fits of laughter all the time. I said to her afterwards that I was glad to see her in such good spirits—when she at once attempted to pull a long face, but gave in, saying, 'Deary me, ma'am, it ain't no use to grumble; and see now the trouble you've took about this 'ere entertainment, 'twould be a sin and shame not to enjoy it. I said I was coming, if I died for it, I said—though my husbin', bein' a brute, did his best to stop me. He said he would cut my throat if I came, but bless you, ma'am, I thought as how I'd risk it.'

"And as I met her and her 'husbin'' walking sociably together yesterday, I think events must have justified the risk," proceeded Mary. "And oh, I heard another bright remark at that tea. One of the old bodies confided to me that she had been 'Very bad for some time,' so I asked what was the matter with her?

"'It's this way, ma'am, it takes me in the back; and the back, you know, is the *Silver Cord as binds us to life.*'"

CHAPTER XIX.

"She wasn't a wife, she was only a Porcupine"—Dr. Dykes finds food for reflection in the facts stated by his Sunday school—"The Queen lives in the Crystal Pallis"—A new rendering of the poem "Casabianca"—The life of the Patriarch Abraham considered very *ondelicate*—A seat held by its possessor at the Creation—Mrs. Kemble tells a circle how she is stated in a book of Memoirs to be "Bold, masculine, and unaccommodating"—Mr. Browning suggests a reason for this—Mrs. Kemble compares a visit to Wordsworth with one to Southey—Relates an anecdote of Thomas Babbington Macaulay's early precocity.

"THAT Sunday School of Dr. Dykes' is a perfect mine of useful information," said Mary, one day. "Listen to what he learned a few Sundays ago. One of the teachers was instructing her class as to the story of Abraham,—of which, by the way, the class appeared to know a good deal already—however she got into full swing, and was proceeding to tell about the flight of Hagar into the wilderness, when a small, anxious voice interrupted her, with 'But please, teacher, was it not very wicked of Abraham to have more than one wife?' Whereupon another little creature turned upon the first in scorn, 'That's all you know about it, silly. Why, the other one wasn't a wife at all, she was only a *Porcupine*!'

"As Dr. Dykes couldn't expect every child to be so learned, he held a School Examination last week, and took a good deal of pains to arrange questions so as to obtain by the answers some actual insight into what the children really knew. He based them on the facts of the Old

Testament, which they had been going through with their teachers.

"Some of them—indeed a good many—quite surprised him by their intelligence," proceeded Mary, "but again there were others who seemed a trifle astray. For instance, Dr. Dykes asked what seemed a simple question, 'Who was the "Pharaoh" who knew Moses?' 'The King of the Jews,' came back the prompt reply.

"Rather strange that he should have driven them out of Egypt then, don't you think?" said Dr. Dykes, pleasantly, but they looked at one another, and evidently wondered if he were trying to be funny? They knew nothing about Egypt.

Dr. Dykes next tried, "Which was Joseph's favourite brother?"

That they all knew, or thought they did. "Benjamin, o' course,—cos he give him two platefuls at dinner."

"A double portion was certainly put into Benjamin's sack," observed Dr. Dykes, drily, "and as I was not prepared to say the latter word might not have been used as a slang term, I thought the answer might pass.

"I wonder if it was like a Frenchman's 'Portion' at a dinner I was at lately," continued he, in parenthesis.

"What was that?" said I.

"He was an eminent man, but not a cosmopolitan," said Dr. Dykes, "and as he was sitting next the host, who was carving, he saw as he thought his plate being filled with the shoulder of a fore-quarter of lamb—the fact being that it was simply removed in order to let the ribs below be free for the carver's knife. The Frenchman never having seen this done in his native land, raised an outcry, 'Ze arf of zat for me if you please.' You may guess there was not too much left for the other guests!"

"My final effort," continued Dr. Dykes, "was hardly successful. I asked 'What did Jacob do when he left his father's house?'—and was told that he 'Served seven years for *cattle*, seven years for *Rebecca*, and seven years for *Ishmael*!' I wonder if it is really any use teaching children those Old Testament stories? The only thing is they may remember something of them after they are grown men and women, and may turn to their Bibles with a kindly feeling towards their childhood, and then—well, who knows what may happen then?"

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"After I parted with Dr. Dykes I fell in with a girl I know, Edith Ellerman," continued Mary, "and told her what we had been talking about. She said that she had a class at St. Mary Abbots' Sunday School. She lives in Kensington, and of course adores Dr. Maclagan, as all his fair flock do. She had never taught in a Sunday School before her parents came to live in London, and her experiences were not quite what she had expected.

"She is a gifted girl, and has travelled, and seen a good deal of the world, so I expect she thought that she would rather wake up that Sunday School class.

"The subject for her first essay was John the Baptist, and Edith thought it was just the subject for her, as she had been over some prisons in Germany, especially one at Nuremberg which had given her plenty of ideas.

"So she started off, and when she got to the Baptist's imprisonment, described the prisons she had seen so graphically that she held her audience open-mouthed, and at last one of them stood up, and said earnestly, 'But please, miss, whatever '*ad* you done that you was put in prison?'

"As this was rather disconcerting, and she found that however she might try to dispel the idea that she was giving her own experiences, the children still clung to it—(she heard them whispering among themselves)—she thought a change of subject might do something, and tried depicting a palace. As Herodias lived in one, and her daughter danced in one, she left St. John in his prison and turned to the wicked court.

"Again they listened gaping, and again one of them had a question to ask. 'You said as 'ow you knew abaht a pallis, cos you'd been to Windsor Castle where the Queen lives,—and please, what did the Queen say to you, miss?'

"Before Edith had time to speak, another little girl pushed forward; '*I* don't believe you saw the Queen at all, for the Queen don't live at Windsor Castle, she lives in the Crystal Pallis!'"

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"While we are on that tack," continued Mary, "I must tell you about a poor woman in my district, who was pluming herself upon the education her daughter was receiving at school, so much superior to anything *she* had ever had. It is always rather pathetic to find a mother proud of being surpassed by her children, and I listened sympathetically while she expatiated, till I nearly spoilt all by laughing when she got to a tale of 'Cassy-by-Anky.'"

"Casabianca?"

"Nothing else. 'You should hear her say her po'try, miss,' said my poor friend. 'Oh, it is bewtiful! Specially the one about Cassy-by-Anky. I know that was the name, cos it put me in mind of a *hankycher*, that was what it did. And it begun like this,' and she threw up her eyes and struck an attitude,—'That boy stood on his burnin' neck, when Lawputtee had fled,—I can't just remember,' she broke off and considered.

"'Who was Lawputtee?' said I. I could not help it.

"''Oo was Lawputtee? Well, I ain't rightly sure, ma'am—not to say *sure*. But I reckon 'e were capting of the ship.'"

"After that, I had to get away as quickly as I could," said Mary, "for the mixture of the 'Burnin' neck' and 'Capting Lawputtee' was getting too much for me."

"I don't find it is only poor people and their children who make odd hashes of familiar lines," said I; "a small boy I know was repeating a piece of poetry to his delighted parents, and a cynical aunt who was present said suddenly, 'Jock is repeating like a parrot, I don't believe he understands what he is saying.'

"This was indignantly repudiated, but the aunt held to it and at length suggested that the little boy should write out one line, which ran, 'Oh, for the lustre of the finest eye!' Great was her triumph and the parents' discomfiture when Jock produced the following: 'Oh, for the *buster* of the *finey stye*!' I don't think Master Jock will be called upon to recite poetry before her again!"

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"Now listen to this," said Mary, "the landlady of a village inn where we stayed for a week last year, was telling me about her daughter—I always ask those sort of people about their sons and daughters—and this landlady was a very nice, attentive woman, and quite ready for conversation at proper times.

"She said Eliza went to the Board School, and had begun learning Physiology,—but she, the mother, went to the teacher and objected. 'I said as how I didn't want my daughter to learn nothing more about her insides. It could never do her any good,' I said, '—besides which it's *rude*.'

"Evidently she piqued herself not a little on her refinement for she went on, 'And I don't let Eliza go to the Parish Church at present neither. For I'm very particular about Eliza. She has to go somewhere else till those sermons about Abraham are finished, for I think the life of Abraham very *ondelicate*!'"

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I went down to the country on a visit, and sought out Mary immediately on my return. "What a pity we were not at the Handel Festival this year. We should not only have heard fine music but seen a curiosity."

"A curiosity?"

"I'll tell you. I have a friend in Essex, who always attends the series, and this year they consisted of 'The Creation,' 'The Messiah,' and 'St. Paul.' She took the same seat for all three performances.

"But on the second day Mrs. Whitburn found her seat occupied. She protested; 'But, madam, this is my seat,' explained the stranger.

"'Excuse me, but I think it is *my* seat,' rejoined the former, and they looked at each other in perplexity, both polite but firm.

"'It is certainly the seat for which I have a ticket,' said he, feeling he was within his rights—but the old lady also felt she was within hers.

"'I think you will find that there is a mistake,' said she, 'for I sat here at "The Creation."'

"At this, she told me, the stranger, who was standing as she was, smiled broadly, and at once moved aside with a deep bow: "'*That* being the case, madam, I *can* have no prior claim!'"

"So you see, if we had been there," argued I, "we should have seen a person who had sat in the Crystal Palace at the creation!"

"I must go straight off to Mrs. Proctor and tell her that," said Mary.

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We had not seen Mrs. Proctor for some time, but she did not seem to have grown any older in the interval, as though now in her eightieth year, she was as bright, cheerful, and vivacious as ever.

We found her as usual with friends about her, Mr.

Browning having the seat of honour, and Miss Thackeray, who was now Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, with her usual sweet willingness to efface herself and make things pleasant for everybody, entertaining some people in the background.

And almost immediately after we had entered, the door opened again to admit Mrs. Fanny Kemble—really Mrs. Butler, but called by the other name everywhere—who without an effort speedily fused the two groups into one.

She was full of the "Life of Charles Sumner," the American Statesman, of which book she had just been sent a copy.

"When one is sent a copy of a book, and the book is about an old friend, the first thing one does is to look for what is said about *oneself*—now, isn't it?" cried she.

"I don't know," said Mary, to whom this was especially addressed, "for I never have copies of books of that kind sent to me. What do you say, Mr. Browning?"

"Oh, I endorse Mrs. Kemble's opinion," laughed he, "and don't I find my name out sharp?"

"I think I should be rather afraid to see what is said of me," said gentle Mrs. Ritchie.

She of all people need not have been, but we let that pass as we all wanted to hear what Mrs. Kemble had to say, and she was evidently burning to say it.

"I flew through the pages, and at last there it was as large as life,—and what do think that rascal Charles said of me—of *me*, one of his oldest and dearest friends?"

As no one could imagine, and as the rascal's commentary was evidently worth hearing, we panted for it. "He said—the villain"—(still better, Charles was growing in depravity,)—"he actually had the impudence to say, 'Mrs. Kemble is a noble woman, bold, masculine and unaccommodating.' Think of it! *Bold, masculine, and unaccommodating!* There's a nice character for you! I wonder when it was that Charlie Sumner found me so unaccommodating?"

"I suppose it was when you refused to marry him," said Mr. Browning, composedly.

"Eh?" said Mrs. Kemble.

"When you refused to marry him," nodded the poet, with a grin.

But he had to deal with a quick-witted woman who was never at a loss. "No, sir, that won't do. *That* won't excuse Charlie Sumner's impertinence, seeing that he never asked me."

"I have nothing else to suggest," said he, with a bow.

No one could help liking Mrs. Kemble; "Unaccommodating" she might be, but it was refreshing to meet with anyone so unaffected.

You never felt she was saying things for effect, like most of her craft. Perhaps they can hardly help it? They must feel when they are being bright and brilliant and everything they ought to be in society, that their charming utterances fall flat if no one applauds.

Mrs. Kemble never seemed to require an audience. She just talked away of whatever came into her head, and to whomsoever was nearest her—and as her talk was always gay and often witty it needed no bush.

And sometimes it was merely sensible and interesting. On the present occasion she out-stayed the bulk of the callers and gave such of us as remained a little history of what had happened to her that afternoon.

"I was lunching at a friends' house, and a girl came in from the South Kensington School of Art. Poor girl, she looked so tired, and could hardly eat anything. Afterwards she revived a little, and as we sat outside over coffee she said to my friend (we three being alone together), 'Do you think it is any good my going day after day to the School of Art when I have no real talent for drawing?

My people think I have, and that it ought to be developed —but I can't help feeling that I might employ my time better.'

"I looked at her poor pale face and heartily agreed with her," said Mrs. Kemble, "for in art of all things there must be the real love of it as well as talent for it to make all the fag worth while—but this poor girl seemed to have neither. However she had not asked for *my* opinion, and apparently it did not tally with that of our hostess. She is a very superior person I must tell you, and when she opens her lips she expects to have her words of wisdom listened to.

"She said, 'My dear girl, don't look at things from such a narrow point of view. Consider this earth of ours; it seems to us so great, but after all it is but a speck in the immensity of space. You yourself are but a mere passing atom;—' and continued in this lofty strain till I had drunk all the coffee in my cup, but still held it before my face, not wishing the expression there to be seen.

"As for the poor Art student, she looked utterly bewildered and crushed. It did not seem to comfort her much that she was to regard herself as a 'Mere passing atom,' so I thought that perhaps it would be unkind to withhold anything I could say that might make her feel better.

"'My dear,' said I, 'perhaps you have a little more talent than you think? You love drawing?'

"'Oh, yes,' said she, fervently; 'and if I only *could*' —and the tears were in her eyes.

"'Cultivate what talent you have,' said I, 'make the most of it, and hope on. Probably your people are right, and if you persevere you will do something yet. But don't trouble your head about the "Vast immensities."'

"It was not very polite of me, but I just had to be impolite," continued the kind-hearted old woman, "for it was of far more importance to try and cheer a poor downhearted fellow-mortal than to bolster up the self-importance of a fool. I haven't told you the name of the 'Vast immensities' lady so I may say 'Fool.' To talk such rubbish to a poor drooping girl! I had no patience with her."

"How did she take it?"

"Quite in good part. She observed when we were alone that she supposed she *had* talked over Ethel's head?"

"So I left it at that and Ethel gave me a most grateful look and squeeze of the hand when she went away."

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Mrs. Kemble came to see me by myself shortly after that. We talked about Scotland as she had been there in her youth and had still vivid recollections of it, notably one which interested me as it would have interested any lover of the Waverley Novels. She had met the Wizard of the North.

It had happened thus; her father, John Kemble, and she were in Edinburgh, and were returning one day from a long ride round by Craigmillar Castle, when they were stopped by a voice calling out their names.

They looked round to behold another rider on a white horse, in whom they recognised Sir Walter Scott, then a familiar figure in the Edinburgh streets.

He with the utmost warmth and cordiality begged them to return with him to his house in Castle Street, and dine "Just as they were."

Her father demurred, but Sir Walter would take no denial; "If I let you go now I shall never catch you again," said he.

"In the end of course we had to go, and what a merry evening it was!" continued Mrs. Kemble, her eyes glistening at the recollection, "Edinburgh *was* a place to live in in those days, I assure you. Sir Walter sent round to one or two of his intimates, and by the time we had shaken ourselves into some kind of order before dinner, they arrived."

"I must tell you of the compliment he paid me on my riding," she interrupted herself. "He was taking me off my horse when he said, 'I see you are a very good horsewoman, for I was jogging along behind you for some minutes before I recognised you and your father. To be a good horsewoman is no small thing in the eyes of a Borderer like myself.'

"That was sixty years ago," said Mrs. Kemble, with a sigh.

But she picked up again the next minute. "To think that I should still remember his very words! . . . And I do! I give you my word that I do. . . . Well, I have repeated them a good many times," she laughed a little, "and got them by heart I suppose. After all, that is nothing to be ashamed of. Such a tribute from such a speaker was not meant to be kept to myself; it would have been folly, waste, a slight to the great and glorious man from whom it emanated to let a syllable of his fall to the ground. . . . There now, that was Fanny Kemble the actress, wasn't it?"—with an arch smile on her cheerful old countenance—"and it really does me good to talk *actress* again once in a while. Sometimes I almost forget that I was ever anything else than what I am now, an old lady who has nothing to do but clean her spectacles!"

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Presently she rose to go, and her eye fell on a sketch I had taken in the Lake Country shortly before. She looked at it for some moments with an interest that was evidently aroused by something other than its intrinsic merits.

"Very pretty—very pretty," she murmured, perfunctorily," that curl of blue smoke reflected in the water—ah, it looked *just* like that when I sat and talked with Wordsworth at Grasmere one September morning long, long ago. This is Grasmere? I thought so. I have never been there since, but one does not forget such scenes."

"Did you stay at Rydal Mount?" I adventured.

"I had the pleasure—or perhaps I should say the honour. It was not precisely a 'Pleasure,'" hesitated Mrs. Kemble, "the Wordsworths were such queer people and so wrapt up in themselves. Even though you were their guest, you were expected in everything to play second-fiddle to the great man of the house. Round *him* everything revolved. *You* might have a poor breakfast, cold dishes, bad coffee—things were mostly bad at Rydal that were only for the inferior general company—but the master's comfort was sedulously attended to. So different from my other poet-friend, Mr. Southey, with whom I also stayed at the Lakes. *He* was 'Everybody's body,' attended to everyone, looked after everyone himself,—while in the Wordsworth household it was the custom for the head of the house to breakfast in bed, wife on one side, daughter on the other, both wholly absorbed in ministering to his wants while every other person might go hang!"

"And it was the same all through the day," she went on. "You might as a stranger long to see all you could of those beautiful lakes and mountains, and almost any hosts would have taken care that you should—but not so the Wordsworths. If it were a dull day and rain impending, there was a chance of *his* getting wet, and all the pros and cons were debated in your presence, but without any reference to *your* possible wetness. If there were a cold wind they shook their heads with decision; *he* was never allowed to walk or drive in a cold wind. If the sun blazed out, well, he *might* go; as he had passed a fairly good night he *might* venture, provided we took a certain round not too long, etc., etc. One was fairly sick of it; and I would not have stayed even the three days I did but that I was on my way to Greta Hall and did not like to incommode the Southeys.

"It was September you see, that loveliest month of all in the Lake country, and every house was full. The Southeys would not have told me so I daresay, for they were hospitable to a degree, but those are the very people that one least wishes to encroach upon. Besides which, there was really no excuse for going. My visit to Rydal was arranged for three days, and it is not exactly easy to say to people 'Under no possible circumstances can I endure you for three days'—now, is it?"

"Still you talked of a certain day at Grasmere with a kind of tenderness?"—hinted I.

"My dear, that's just what one does at eighty. Everything that you look back upon if you look far enough takes on a rosy hue, the 'Enchantment' of 'Distance' you know. The poet and I certainly sat and talked together, and it certainly was a lovely evening—just such an evening as you have depicted here"—pointing to my sketch—"the hill-tops melting in the sunset, with their long-drawn shadows in the lake beneath,—but I think perhaps that I more felt I *ought* to find all that loveliness embellished by the poet Wordsworth's society than that I actually *did* find it. There! That is the truth. You know how people when asked to name their favourite books nearly always enumerate the books they perhaps *admire*, but don't *read*? You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," said I, "and had an instance of it the other day."

"No? Tell me," said Mrs. Kemble, alertly.

Nothing loth, I began: "My husband and I were stopping at an old inn, 'The George' on the Menai Straits, and it rained and rained. We were not there for pleasure; he had business to attend to; so we stayed on, and I exhausted all the books we had with us and struggled out to a little library for more.

"The other people did the same and among them was a school-boy who brought in 'Verdant Green.' Before night we were all throwing our literature aside with yawns, but the happy boy was still absorbed in 'Verdant Green'—and the end of it was that we, every one of us, and there were some scholars among us, were all wanting to borrow 'Verdant Green' at once! We watched for it; if anyone went out of doors and left 'Verdant Green' lying about, it was surreptitiously pounced upon; if a reader were observed nearing the last page he was asked to pass it on when done with. I had brought in Turgenieff's 'Virgin Soil' and some of the others had deeper and more strenuous literature, but no one was petitioned for a loan of a single volume, as far as I remember, except that honest school-boy who had got the reading he *really liked*, and was as proud as Punch to have it appreciated."

That was what I said to Mrs. Kemble, and since then, (very much "Since," for it happened only the other day,) a similar experience befel me when the book obtaining such popularity was "Sherlock Holmes." "Sherlock Holmes" had been introduced into a bored circle of elderly folks by a sprightly youngster recovering from an illness, and though every one of the ancients had read it before, they all wanted to read it again!

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"But I think we really did like some serious books when I was a girl," said Mrs. Kemble, reverting to "Verdant Green," after a digression. "Some of us did at least. For instance, you know Miss Macaulay, a sister of the great Macaulay? No? You have never heard her talk of her childhood, then? It was a humdrum, almost intolerable childhood, from my point of view, accustomed as I was to the feverish life of the stage and its concomitants—but it had its enviable points. Its very depth of dulness made the little brothers and sisters magnify every small pleasure and turn to account their long, monotonous evenings—stop I'll explain. Can you fancy a lively set of children—there were nine youthful Macaulays—willing to listen to an elder brother while he read out to them Clarendon's 'History of the Great Rebellion'? It was 'Thomas Babbington' who read and no doubt read well—but he must have been a precocious monkey, for his sister declared that he would close the book every now and then, and walk up and down the room explaining difficult passages to the younger children!"

"And now I really must go,—" and again my adorable old visitor rose; and I saw that her cheeks were flushed a bright pink and that a tired look was creeping into her eyes, and realised that the Fanny Kemble before me was not just a girl of twenty with the spring of youth dancing in her veins. She and Age had parted company during the last hour, but they crept away together.

CHAPTER XX.

A dinner at Hurlingham to the new Solicitor-General—He tells some election experiences—Two worn-out, miserable canvassers on the wrong tack—A lunatic and his keeper left to keep house—"He's an owd mon, doant hoist un oop if he doant loike it"—Canon Greenwell leaps in the air—And comes down on Mr. Barnes' top-hat—A speech that had no point—Sir Farrer Herschell does not want to go home.

"We have the new Solicitor-General coming to us to-night," said Mary, "and as he is fagged out with the rush of events lately, I propose that we keep him to ourselves, drive him down to Hurlingham in the cool of the evening, and dine there. Can you both come?"

We could and did. It was a lovely June day, and the old gardens heavy with foliage above, brilliant with blossom below, were at their fullest and gayest when our little party arrived.

Hurlingham has scarcely altered at all within the last thirty years, but there is one notable improvement, and that is the creation of a space between the barrier of the polo ground and the front row of spectators.

There was no such space in 1880, and owing to this we were once witnesses of an unfortunate accident. The polo ball hopped over the barrier, the ponies thundered after, and all at once there was a cry and a commotion. A man was lying on the ground; he had been kicked and his leg was broken.

That things were no worse was the wonder, but it was bad enough for the sufferer—I have forgotten his name—

but believe he was not permanently injured, and we will hope consoled himself with having by his individual mishap benefitted humanity—for the present broad divisional space was made immediately afterwards.

After dinner we sat on the terrace, drew our chairs into a semicircle, and Sir Farrer Herschell, for it was he who had just been called upon to fill the post of Solicitor-General, lit his cigar and led the talk.

He was in his most genial and expansive mood. He was among those before whom he could talk freely. He had much to say, and we were all content to listen.

"Before I forget it," he began, addressing me personally, "I must tell you that your country-women don't seem to have any very ardent desire for Woman's Suffrage, if we are to go by the opinion of one buxom dame I encountered during the Midlothian election. She is the mainstay of her family, a great, strong, stirring body capable of any amount of work and as clever as you make 'em. It was thought she would be an excellent example of a she-voter, but when approached on the subject she spurned the idea. 'Let the menfolk alone,' said she, 'let them keep their votes to themsels. It's the ae thing they *can* do, and Gudesakes! let them do it!'

"So now I know how my wife feels," continued Sir Farrer, gaily. "She says to herself every time I go forth to the House of Commons, 'It is the ae thing he *can* do, and Gudesakes! let him do it!'"

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"But tell us about your own election," said Mary. "You know we were in Egypt when it came off, and have never heard any of your droll encounters, for droll encounters you had, Mr. Thompson assured me, though he did not seem to remember what they were."

"Thompson is not much of a story-teller," rejoined Sir

Farrer; "but he is a prince of canvassers! He was my colleague," he explained to me aside.

Of course I knew that, as I had followed the Durham election with the keenest interest, but our modest companion never, not to the end of his life (upon the Woolsack) took it for granted that those about him were cognisant of his personal affairs.

"It was bad luck for me the dissolution taking place while I was in the thick of the Clewer case," said he, now, "for I had such a horrible long speech to make that it took three days; and there was I mouthing away and trying to keep my thoughts off Durham, while every hour brought fresh telegrams urging my presence there! At last release came, and Thompson joined me at the station, for it would have been no use his going down first by himself—we had to work together.

"When we reached Durham, dead-tired, (though I slept most of the journey,) and hoped to slip quietly into our hotel and dine in peace, you may guess we didn't bless the sight of a crowd waiting to hoist us on to their shoulders—but on this wobbly elevation we had to be borne along, with a band playing in front, and then there had to be harangues from the hotel balcony!"

"I have always pitied Royalties for that," said Mary. "Those station receptions and presentations after journeys must be terrible. But then of course they don't travel quite as ordinary mortals do."

"Some ordinary mortals make themselves extraordinarily comfortable," returned Sir Farrer, with a quizzical glance at her. "I know you *can* rough it"—(for he had been across the steppes of Tartary with Mary and her husband)—"but what with couriers and dragomen, and plenteous and seasonable tipping, there is not much about the luxury of modern travel that you and John don't know. However, public receptions when you are tired and hungry and dirty—"

"Or sea-sick," interpolated she.

"Or sea-sick, more ghastly of all—are happily not forced upon *you*. Thompson and I were two worn-out, miserable men before we got to bed that night."

"Before your canvass had even begun?"

"Recollect that I had done a good day's work before I could allow myself to think I was the candidate for Durham. I simply had had to shut down that door in my mind. Then when the door opened, what a rush! The strange thing was that I slept soundly that night; better than usual indeed, and rose a giant refreshed. Not quite a giant perhaps"—he looked down at himself and laughed, for he was not a big man—"but anyway there was giants' work to be done, and Thompson and I did it."

He paused and resumed.

"Thompson was magnificent. Canvassing would seem to be his native element. Directly he entered a room he took one rapid glance round and started upon his topic, which was either a book or a picture or a stuffed bird or wax flowers under a glass-case! Nothing in that room came amiss to him as a peg on which to begin conversation. And his face of interest, his tone of admiration!"

"By-and-by he would inquire into the householder's trade or occupation? In a minute you would have thought he knew everything there was to be known about it—much as we barristers have to make a display of knowledge only obtained the night before, when we are conducting a case in court!"

"When you are so shocked by the iniquitous practice of '*Bulking gum*'!" interposed I, slily.

"Ah, you will never forget that," laughed the Solicitor-General.

He had taken me once to hear a case tried in which the defendants were accused of what appeared to be a heinous offence in a mercantile community, and when I asked him the same evening what was meant by that "Bulking" of gum which he had denounced in such withering accents, he had had to own that though he had been coached for the occasion, he had really forgotten by that time what the process was!

"Yes, that is one of the tricks of our trade," laughed he, now, "but I was new to the canvassing trade, and was simply amazed at Thompson."

"Once however he was caught out. We had been told late one cold, dark evening that we must go off to interview a tenant-farmer. You may guess we blessed that farmer, for to have to turn out after dinner when we had comfortably settled down in our arm-chairs was disgusting, but we were told it was the only time to catch the man at home—so we buttoned ourselves into our great-coats and sallied forth.

"The farm was about two miles off. We were admitted to the kitchen, and it looked cosy enough, with a dull, heavy-looking individual seated on one side of the fire, and a bright, sensible-looking one on the other. Thompson did not hesitate for an instant as to which was the most promising.

"Following his usual tactics, he plied the bright man with intelligent questions and accorded every reply his profoundest attention, when Canon Greenwell, one of the resident clergy who was our able coadjutor, suddenly appeared in the doorway. He had guided us to the farm, but had remained outside not to overpower the inmates by our numbers. 'Come away—come away,' said he, in my ear. I was complacently letting Thompson do all the work, while I sat by with a sociable air—"

"—A sociable air—what's that?"

"What you see now. This is my sociable air," and he composed a face, "and Thompson said it went down very well in Durham—but I must own that it did not seem to create much impression on the stolid yokel by the fire; he was neither listening to Thompson nor looking at me!"

"'What's the matter?' replied I, to the canon, 'why are we to come away?'

"'A mistake our coming,' whispered he, back. 'We are wasting our time, and I can't but think have been fooled by some of our opponents' men. I'll find that out later, but meantime give Thompson a hint and let's be off.'

"When we got outside, escorted by the bright man, from whom we parted amiably—the other never moving from his chimney-corner—the canon gave a sort of growl. 'A mare's nest,' he said, 'and they know that, those chaps who let us in for it. The master of the house is not at home; slipped away on purpose to escape the election, and left behind his lunatic brother—' here Thompson exclaimed.

"'Oh, not the one you were cajoling,' said the canon, '*he* was the keeper!'

"'Well, all I can say is, he was an uncommonly agreeable keeper,' protested Thompson, 'and he was one of my compatriots, so I was quite glad to have a chat with him.'

"So he tried to carry it off, but I had nothing to say. It did seem too bad that we should have had that cold trudge in the dark for nothing."

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"I had my own especial grievance later on," resumed Sir Farrer; "a staunch old Tory sent for me to go and see him, as he was crippled with rheumatism and could not come to me.

"That's all right," I said, "I'll go. But there seemed no need for Thompson to go too, so not to waste force I went myself, and confidently expected to bring back the old gentleman's promise to vote for us.

"I found a nice country-house, and was shown into the library. At the far end was a wheel-chair in which sat a muffled-up figure, and a hand was stretched out to me; 'I sent for you,' said my new friend, plunging at once into the heart of things, 'because I knew your mother and her people when I was a boy. I knew all the Baillies, and spent many a pleasant holiday at their house. I have watched your career with great interest—' (Now we are coming to the point, thought I—) 'and sent for you to say how exceedingly sorry I am not to feel able to stretch my principles so far as to vote for you. Had I been able to do this, nothing would have given me greater pleasure.'

"But as he was *not* able," commented Sir Farrer, "I felt that I would have been content to receive his sorrow by letter, and returned a good deal crestfallen to the hotel."

"And when the election-day came, was it not terribly, frightfully exciting?" demanded Mary. "I don't suppose you slept much the night before?"

"The night before? Oh, I don't know. We were all thankful that whichever way the poll went, at least there was an end of the canvass," said Sir Farrer. "It was a relief to feel that. And there was some fun in the day itself too. It was all new to both of us. The counting of votes began at six o'clock in the evening, and lasted two hours. We had our ups and downs of course, but as time wore on and it became tolerably plain that the victory would be ours, some on our side could hardly control themselves.

"I sat still enough, but was not as calm as I looked. Thompson was trembling a good deal. As for that dear old boy Greenwell, he was out of himself altogether. When it was announced that we had won, he gave a great spring into the air in his excitement, and what did he do but alight on our secretary's new top-hat, which had fallen on to the floor!

"The canon is a heavy man, and the hat crumpled beneath him; but he took no notice. He jumped on it again and again. I saw poor Barnes pick it up at last, and furtively try to straighten it out, but as it would not be straightened I suppose he concluded to cast care aside and cheer with the rest, for he waved it wildly, regardless of its condition. We'll hope the canon had the grace to apologise afterwards."

"And then? What happened then?"—said Mary.

"We had an excellent majority, so there was a great demonstration. We were hoisted again on to the shoulders of some of the leaders of our party, but as the two carrying Thompson were of unequal heights, he tried to protest, on which a voice from the crowd cried out: 'Let un be. Doan't hoist 'un oop if he doan't loike it. He's an owd mon, let un walk.' So the 'Owd mon' was put down, and walked, to his great relief; but as I was not 'Owd' I had to endure the ordeal."

"Did you expect to be made Solicitor-General so soon after that?"—inquired I.

"Well,—" said Sir Farrer, and laughed.

He had then something to relate about receiving his knighthood, as it was bestowed at a Drawing-Room, an unusual occurrence. "And we were only told about it the day before," added he.

For some reason which he did not explain or which I have forgotten, an exception to the rule took place, and the officials being thrown out thereby, a hitch in the procedure was the consequence. Thus it came about that when he entered the Royal presence no warning voice heralded his approach with the customary, "To receive the honour of knighthood," and consequently no Sword of State was forthcoming!

"The Queen was fairly *bunkered*, as golfers say," averred Sir Farrer. "There was I, and she knew perfectly why I was there, for there is nothing she does not know about these occasions, but she could not perform her part without a sword, and she looked very cross. They say nothing annoys Her Majesty more than negligence of this sort. She called out sharply, 'Bring the sword,'—but though there was a dart for it, I had to remain nearly a minute on my knees before I felt a light tap on both shoulders and heard 'Rise, Sir Farrer.'"

"Even then we did not seem to get along smoothly," continued our new-made knight, "for rise I couldn't. It was all very well for the Queen to say 'Rise,' but while she continued to flourish her Sword of State about, I was not going to run up against it. So I cast upwards a helpless and imploring eye, and a new commandment was given me: 'Kiss hands,' said the Queen, shortly.

"I kissed her hand, and wondered what next? Apparently however the Royal soul was satisfied, for the Sword, to my great relief, was handed to an official, and up I got at last. Some day, I suppose, I may have to kneel again, but I don't imagine there will be any Sword of State on *that* occasion."

"There will not," said Mary, quietly.

When some six years afterwards she was present at the House of Lords to see Sir Farrer Herschell place his patent of nobility on the throne and take it back with his own hands from the throne, before assuming his title as Lord Chancellor of England, she told us afterwards that she thought of his remark on this occasion, "And I knew of what he was thinking," she added.

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We continued to talk and to listen on the terrace at Hurlingham.

"I heard rather a nice story about a will when I was in the north," said Sir Farrer. "The will came into court, for it was so ambiguously worded that the result was as usual a family quarrel.

"And there was a good deal to quarrel over, for the testator, an old ironmaster, had been a very wealthy man—so that his many sons could all have had a good bit if only the old fellow had not tried to be too clever. As it was, none of them knew what they had or hadn't.

"They kept it as quiet as they could, however; so that one day a friend in ignorance of the circumstances, on observing the broad band of crape round the hat of one of the sons, instantly pulled a sympathetic face. 'Allow me to condole with you on your bereavement,' said he.

"'Well,' rejoined the bereaved one, shaking his head sorrowfully, 'I'll tell you what. It's just this. Our father's death might have been *a real pleasure* to us, instead of which it's nothing but *a misery*!'"

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"You know Holker, the new Attorney-General?" Sir Farrer turned to Mary presently, "wasn't it he who backed up your opinion about that compensation case in Manchester last year?"

She replied that it was, and was immediately asked to tell about the "Compensation Case," but said, "Let us hear the new Holker first."

"Oh, there is no new Holker," said Sir Farrer, laughing, "but I dined with him last night, and he asked after you and referred to the case? He thought you must have a fine legal head. By the way though, I did hear a good saying of his a little time ago; he was speaking in court about the salary one of the witnesses was in receipt of, and said it was ten shillings a week.

"'I think, Mr. Holker, you are wrong; I think it is ten shillings a *day* the witness said he was earning,' corrected the presiding judge.

"'Ah, my lord,' said Holker, with a sigh, 'I was thinking of my own poor gains.'

"That wasn't bad," commented our narrator, "considering that if he was making a penny Holker was making nine or ten thousand a year at that time. I forget how you came into contact with him?" he turned to Mary.

"The Montagus and I went into the Law Courts in Manchester when the Assizes were on, and you got me a seat on the Bench," said she, "and Mr. Holker was defending the case. When the Court adjourned for luncheon we were invited to join the judge's party, and heard him telling the other judge who had come along too, about the case; and they put their wise heads together about the amount of compensation the plaintiff would get. And one of them asked me, and I really did not know what to say, so blurted out, 'Forty pounds.'"

"Drawing a bow at a venture!" interposed her husband.

"Not quite that," said Mary; "I had done my best to follow the case, but still it was naturally nothing but a *guess*. So you may imagine my amazement when on our return to the court the foreman of the jury informed the judge they had decided to award the plaintiff compensation amounting to forty pounds! That evening you and Mr. Holker dined with us at our hotel," to Sir Farrer; "and I told him of my lucky hit, and he chaffed me about having the mental calibre of a common juryman. Ten pounds, he said, would have been *ample*, but that the judge made a mess of it in summing up. That was the worst of—what was his name?" she broke off to inquire. "I have forgotten it."

"And I think you had better keep on forgetting it," cautioned Sir Farrer, "for Holker has a two-edged tongue when he chooses, and has always a sly cut at our friend in question."

"He told me that he did not dare to try and enliven that weary, dreary case, because certain dull people did not appreciate jokes; *now* I understand," said Mary. "And what do you think the judge said of him? He said, 'Mr.

Holker looks very stupid, but he can be really quite funny.' "

" Holker's solemn face takes in a good many people," said Sir Farrer.

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Presently he recollected another legal anecdote, and told it with spirit. " We are thankful for almost anything that relieves the monotony of some long-winded peroration," said he, " but if it is anything *good* we are ready to fall upon the neck of the speaker. We had a youngster the other day who thought he was making a very fine maiden speech, adorning it plentifully with quotations from the classics. He soared aloft in great style, and had it all his own way till his opponent got up and observed drily, 'Our young friend has treated us to much classical lore, for which we are greatly indebted to him. He has Socked with Socrates, he has Ripped with Euripides, he has Sided with Thucydides, he has Most with Demosthenes, but it seems to me that he knows nothing about Wisconsin Law, as I will now proceed to demonstrate to you.' "

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" I have thought of something else," said he, again. " Something that happened during Grantham's election. He was addressing a meeting, when one of the crowd in the hall rose up and said pompously, 'Sir, before I promise you my vote, I should like to know your opinions about the game laws?'

" 'About the game laws, my friend?' said Grantham. 'Well, I can't give you my opinion about the game laws or anything else while you are at one end of the hall and I at the other, but if you will come up beside me on the platform, I will endeavour to satisfy you.'

" At this there was a sort of scuffle in the background, and it was the man being pushed forward by his friends obviously against his will.

"When he arrived upon the platform he proved to be a great, coarse, hulking fellow with bloodshot eyes, and Grantham, chuckling inwardly, had him escorted to the front.

"'You want to hear my opinion about the game laws? My friend, there are only three classes of men who need trouble themselves about the game laws. One is the landed proprietor, another is the tenant-farmer, and a third is the poacher. I am sure you are not a landed proprietor, I think I may say you are not a tenant-farmer, and as for poachers we must not speak of *them* to respectable people,—so really I don't see where you come in! How can the game laws possibly concern you?'

"As the man could not see either, and as Grantham's quiet irony provoked a roar of laughter from the hall at his expense, he slunk out of sight as quickly as might be, and the game laws were religiously left alone during the rest of the canvass."

"I love electioneering stories," said Mary.

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"Will you have one about full-blown M.P.'s for a change?" said Sir Farrer. "Here it is. The Conservative Whip said one day to the Liberal Whip—(both being excellent friends in private life)—'I say, I do wish you would try to hurry on the Division, for I have a member here who is really very ill and ought to go home. I am keeping him up with brandy, but he is making me very uneasy, for he is getting so quiet.'"

"Quiet, is he?" said the other. "Quiet? You can't be more anxious for the Division than I am, for I, too, have a member in charge, and he is not *quiet*. I only wish he *were*, for he is a raving lunatic."

"What a pointless story!" appended Sir Farrer, suddenly throwing himself back in his chair and laughing heartily. "In self-defence I must tell you that in the suppressing the names of the two Whips and their two friends I had to take out the whole point of it—but I suppose I ought to have thought of that beforehand," he concluded, resignedly.

We then talked of quagmires of the kind into which we had fallen at divers times. My own contribution was as follows: "A certain old Scotch colonel, one of the salt of the earth, was called upon unexpectedly to deliver an address at a temperance meeting with whose views he was supposed to be in sympathy. He started off, and rambled on and on for a perfectly insupportable length of time, and what was worse the speech finally ended abruptly where, according to the old Scotch song, 'Nae end suld be.'

"It puzzled his auditors how to compliment their friend who had only spoken out of kindness in order to fill a vacancy—but he himself cleared up the mystery. 'It was awful,' he said, 'a perfect nightmare! I saw no hope anywhere. The fact was I really had a good story to tell, but dared not tell it. I had forgotten the end when I led off with the beginning; and the whole point of it, the whole sting in the tail lay in the admonition to drink whiskey rather than water, and brandy rather than whiskey! And you see, *no* point was better than *that* point.'"

"I don't altogether agree with him!" said Sir Farrer.

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We had to go at last. The stars were bright above the tree-tops, and the cooing of the wood-pigeons had long ceased. The scent of great, white, heavy-headed syringa-blossoms filled the air. A lazy toad crawled across the terrace at our feet. "I feel like the children," said the hard-worked man, whose brief hour of rest was over, "I don't want to go home!" And he looked round with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXI.

Princes Gate deemed an unfashionable quarter—"Cawn't think how my aunt gets these people to come so far to her parties"—"But you see she has a deer-forest"—"I've got my invitation; she's a brick"—Miss Jean Ingelow wishes her admirers would write to her, not call—An exception in the case of the actress, Miss Mary Anderson—"Shall I shew you my arms?"—The Baroness Burdett-Coutts—A terrible garden-party at Strawberry Hill—Lady Waldegrave's absent-minded guest—A fiasco at Holland Villas Road—Mary is "so *glad* we were there!"

Londoners in the past attached even greater importance to living in a fashionable locality than they do at the present day.

There were always of course the happy few who could and would live where they chose, secure that the world would go to them wherever they were, but the bulk of ordinary mortals having any desire to be in the social "swim"—(a new word, but an old, old desire)—placed themselves within a very narrow and limited area. This was what I heard pass between two young exquisites at an evening party in Princes Gate.

"*You* here?"

"*You* here?" Then they lay up against a doorway and looked round. "Cawn't think how my aunt gets these people to come to her," emitted one, as well-known names were bawled on the staircase, "such a deuced long way to come!"

"My man didn't know where Princes Gate was!"—yawned the other.

I learnt afterwards that each was paying court to an influential relation who had the whim to live in "the wilds of South Kensington"—an eccentricity of which both were ashamed.

With one of the two my husband and I had a slight acquaintance, and he now caught sight of us. He told us three times in the course of the first five minutes that he could not think how people could plant themselves down in such an out-of-the-way part. He said this in varying terms, but it was all to the same effect. He did not seem to be able to get away from the idea as a grievance.

"It does take a long time to come," said I, gravely. "I think we must have taken quite twenty minutes."

"Well, twenty minutes is twenty minutes to me," replied our dandy, with equal seriousness. "I can hardly ever get out here to see my aunt—give you my word I can't. And how people can live in such a ridiculous part—" etc., etc.

"It is very good of you to come at all." My husband grinned aside at this irony, but it passed unnoticed by its object.

"Well, you see," he drew nearer and waxed confidential, "you see she has a deer-forest. One of the best deer-forests in Scotland. Simply splendid. And if I don't do my duty here in London," with increasing impressiveness, "I may whistle for my invitation in September."

"I see. Of course, you like going to the deer-forest?"

"Like it?" His eyes shone, his lips parted. He was no longer the same man. Where was the gilded youth with his lisping drawl and world-weary air? "I should just think I *do* like it. There's nothing in the world to equal it when you are two thousand feet up upon the heather, and the sun is getting over the tops of the crags and the mists are floating all about you and the deer are in the glen below—oh, it's glorious—glorious!"

As I agreed that it was glorious and knew something of the mighty Ben on which he gazed with far-away eyes, he was pleased to continue in this strain for some time, and I had quite lost sight of the jaded guardsman in the hardy Highlander when the former was unpleasantly recalled by his meeting with other people he knew.

Then the parrot-cry broke out again. "Such a fag getting here! What on earth does my aunt mean by living in such a part? Give you my word, it took me twenty minutes to come—" but here Lord Jamie stopped and reddened.

"You are laughing at me," he whispered.

"How far can you get in twenty minutes up the side of Ben Wyvis?" said I.

On which he gave me a look, a real human look, and murmured "*Oh!*" There was a world of love and longing in that "*Oh!*"

Later he accosted us again, jubilant. "It's all right; I've got my invitation. And for the very time I want it. She's a brick, that dear old aunt of mine, and—"

"—And now you won't grudge having had to come so far to her party?"

"Oh, I'll come every day of the week if she wants me," cried he, joyously. "And trot at her heels wherever she goes besides. I don't care for Goodwood, and I hate Cowes—but I'll dance attendance on her at both if it pleases her. Do you know," with a sly look, "one of us came a cropper with the old lady just now. He thinks he can shoot, and he can't—not even a keeper! And her ladyship has a mania about her deer not being wounded. Quite gone in the head about it she is. They must be killed 'clane and cliver' by any guns *she* sends out.

"So she asked Dick Bazill if he had ever shot deer, and poor Dick—whose chief desire in life is to be thought a sportsman—was on the tiptoe of expectation, but not prepared to perjure himself, so he had to own he never had.

"And, of course, *I* knew how it would be with my venerable relation directly that came out," chuckled the informer, "and jolly glad I was to have my date fixed up and all settled, I can tell you! I'll stay at this beast of a party—or," with a happy thought, "can't I take you to your carriage?" For we were in the hall, and the crush was great.

"Yes, take me, and slip away down the side-aisle afterwards!"

"And I'll *walk* home—by Jove, I will!" announced he, stoutly. He felt man enough for the wildest exertion now.

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This little piece of affectation on the part of an honest youth was not confided by me to Mary, who would not have understood it. She had such an absolutely independent mind that fashionable caprices and follies made no appeal to her, and as she was not influenced by them herself, she would, I knew, be intolerant of their influence upon others.

Accordingly I held my tongue about the "Fag" of going all the way out to Princes Gate, even when my dear Mary herself complained of the distance we had to traverse in order to reach Holland Villas Road, West Kensington.

"It's not because *I* mind going so far to see *her*," she explained however, "but because living where she does, Jean can come so seldom to see *me*. Why ever did she go and plant herself in a place miles away from everybody? And she has no carriage—and she is not strong—" and she grumbled on.

But all the time we were trotting along, and presently—I cannot say soon, for we really were a considerable time upon the road—we drew up at the gate of a small detached villa, and inquired if Miss Jean Ingelow were at home?

A neat maid answered briskly that she was, and showed us into a drawing-room on the ground floor, through the large open window of which we could see a figure sitting in the garden below.

"Don't bring your mistress in," said Mary, as the maid prepared to step on to the balcony outside, "we will go to her." And she stepped out herself.

Before I followed I glanced around. Was this the shrine of the poetess?

I was not the unreflective school-girl I had been when first the marvellously beautiful poetry of Miss Jean Ingelow was brought beneath my notice, and experience had taught me that poets and day-dreamers and all that kind of "kittle cattle" could in imagination build up for themselves fairy palaces while actually inhabiting jerry-built villas so vulgarly hideous that only to look at them depressed the spirits. Still I wondered a little.

The house was not jerry-built—it was good of its kind, and high-priced, as we learned afterwards—but it seemed a strangely unfitting setting for the author of—well, everything Jean Ingelow ever wrote betrayed her love of beauty and sensitive appreciation of it.

A remark she made to me in after years, when we grew to know each other well, comes to my memory now. "If *you* had written St. Paul's epistles you wouldn't have written them as he did."

Certainly I had never supposed I should, but could not say the question had ever been mooted to me before. She saw I was laughing, but went on seriously: "You would have made much of the beautiful landscapes, the wonderful scenes around you—but St. Paul never once mentions them! I don't think he can have been a lover of scenery."

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This sort of simple saying was very characteristic of Jean Ingelow. She was simplicity itself. And her modesty was equal to it. It is not too much to say that of all the talented women I have ever met, and these have been not a few, I have found none to excel her.

And the temptation to be otherwise must have been constantly present. We know that beauties of the first water are not the ones who are vainest of their charms. We know that great men are nearly always humble men. But a little, homely, dumpy body, with nothing about her outwardly to attract yet conscious of powers within that commanded the world's homage—could there have been a more certain subject for self-importance?

And Jean Ingelow was not even self-conscious. If she were let alone to be herself, she was natural, cheerful, talkative, if she were forced to be the recipient of adulation she was miserable. "My dear, if they would only *write*," she said once, referring to a group of Transatlantic adorers who had poured forth their heart's blood at her feet, "they are very kind, and I feel so ashamed of having nothing nice to say in return, but I am so stupid—I am the stupidest woman on earth when I have to meet people face to face."

"But afterwards you can think over all the pleasant things said to you."

"Oh, yes; I can." She looked at me quite frankly, "And I do like to tell my brothers of them. William and Ben like to have people find me out and flatter me. But I am always so glad when it is over. I dread the doorbell during the London season. It is not the gay world that troubles its head about me—"

"—It is the great world."

"Why, you are as bad as the rest," said Jean, but she put out her hand and laid it upon mine.

Presently she resumed. "Yes, it's true. I ought to be very glad that I am able to give pleasure to so many in such far-off places, and grateful to them for letting me know of it, but I must confide in you a secret—promise not to think me silly—*I always feel that strangers are disappointed in me.*"

Here was an admission and an unfortunate one, for it could not be gainsaid. Had I not myself been disappointed? My thoughts flew back to that first day at the little Kensington villa when I saw Miss Ingelow sitting in her garden, and experienced a distinct feeling of disappointment, not to say disillusion. I hung my head, and the truthful voice continued: "My dear, you know it *is* so.... You have seen the blank looks. I daresay you have heard the comments afterwards?"

I daresay I had, many a time and oft—but when I beheld the kind, gentle face so artlessly looking for an answer, I could not give it. It stuck in my throat.

I had heard people say, "*That* Jean Ingelow the poetess? That very ordinary, common-place individual?" And I myself had seen for myself that the Jean Ingelow thus presented was everything the reverse of graceful and romantic, but what then? Were there not hundreds of thousands externally resembling her yet with no glorious hidden gift to more than counterbalance every outward deficiency?

Surely she was to be envied rather than pitied? Surely it would have been too much for any mortal here below if beauty of person and magnificence of surroundings had been added to majesty of intellect? I think she caught something of this upon my countenance, for she smiled and said softly, "Thank you, my dear."

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This was after we had had intimate and affectionate intercourse with each other for years, and I must now return to the day when it began.

Miss Ingelow was quietly reading under the trees when we interrupted her solitude ; and we should have hesitated before doing so but for two things. The neat maid evidently expected company—and so did her mistress.

There was an indefinable air of best dress and best cap about the latter. One does not sit down to read in peace in a purple silk gown with a lace fichu and hanging lace sleeves (terribly in the way). One does not don a superior cap with satin ribbons hanging down the back—nor beaded and buckled shoes with pointed toes,—and to conclude, I was more than sure that Miss Jean Ingelow *au naturel* did not wear a gold chain thick as a manacle, and a cameo brooch, and queer but probably valued old rings.

Accordingly we approached fearlessly, and the poetess laid down her book and came half-way across the little lawn to meet us.

With Mary whom she knew, she was not shy nor embarrassed—(as we saw her afterwards when others arrived)—and we returned with her to her seat in the shade.

After a little she said, "I had such a charming visitor yesterday, and you will never guess who. Miss Mary Anderson, the actress."

"It was not my 'Day,' of course," continued Miss Ingelow, "and I was not prepared for company, as I am to-day," and she looked down on herself with the innocent complacency of a child—"but she was so sensible. She just told Anne to take her card up to me and say, Would I see her, as it was the only day and time she could come? Of course, I put aside my writing at once. Yes, I am busy at present—" she coloured as she did to the end of her life when owning as much—"but for such an interruption I would have stopped anything. I did feel the compliment of it. It seems that she had heard how much I regretted not seeing her in the part of the 'Lady of Lyons.'"

"But it is going on now, Miss Ingelow." I was the speaker ; I did not understand.

"Yes, it's going on now," said she, gently, "but I don't go to theatres. I lose a great deal by this, and sometimes I could almost persuade myself to shake off the prejudice of my youth and go like everyone else. Why not? There are plays that not only do no harm but positive good. I consider that everybody who writes a good play is writing a valuable sermon. But I have no need to say so to either of you."

"No, for we both feel as you do, only I have a husband who does not," said Mary, simply. "So, like you, I am bound and fettered."

Miss Ingelow glanced at her. The cases were not precisely similar, but she did not enter into them. "I had heard so much of Miss Mary Anderson's beauty, and I do so love to see a really beautiful woman, that it seems I said something of this to Sir Frederick Locker lately, and he repeated it, and it came to Miss Anderson's ears. The nice, dear creature! Instead of being offended that my prejudices would not let me go to see her on the stage she came off at once to see me in my own house! What a lovely girl she is! It was a treat to sit and look at her!"

"And she looks as well by daylight as by gaslight," said I. "I have seen her in both lights, so can judge. I thought her divine as 'Pauline' on the stage, but when she passed me in Kensington Gardens yesterday—where I was walking with my children—she seemed even more perfect. She lingered as she went by, and looked at them with a most heavenly smile."

"That exactly describes it," said Miss Ingelow, eagerly, "'a most heavenly smile.' And she did one thing which no other woman in England could, I suppose. She offered to show me her arms! It was a hot day like this, and she might just as well have asked leave to pull off her gloves in order to cool herself, but she made not the slightest pretence of doing this, she just said, 'Would you like to see my arms?' My heart went out to her for it."

"Are they very beautiful?" said Mary.

"Oh, beautiful," exclaimed Miss Ingelow and I, both speaking together. But while I had only seen the said arms above the footlights, she had had a private view in broad sunshine, not to say beneath the open sky—we looked to her to continue.

"I have seen very little statuary," resumed she, "but I *have* seen one or two exquisite figures, and Mary Anderson's arms rivalled theirs in smoothness, roundness, and whiteness. She sat down here and let them lie upon her lap. There was a kind of infantile unconsciousness about her which I could not have believed to have seen in a member of her profession. It was most delightful, but will it last? I wish—I wish—" she sighed.

"I guess what," said Mary.

"Yes, she seems fitted for a purer atmosphere, and I feel sure would be happier in it. Perhaps it may come!"

We then talked of other things,—but when the stage lost its fair ornament and a happy home was the gainer by its loss, I thought of the above words, and wrote to my friend who had become by then a real friend, and said that I had passed the erstwhile star of the theatrical world walking by the shore of Oban Bay with a flock of little ones around her.

They were all laughing and sporting on the edge of the incoming tide, and a pretty sight it was.

My walking companion, after a second look, observed in an undertone, "Do you see who that is? She has grown stouter, but otherwise has not altered much."

I looked and beheld a fair, plump, merry-looking creature, the centre of the frolic—but I did not recognise anyone I had ever seen before.

"Don't you?" said my brother. "I don't know what her married name is, but she *was* Mary Anderson, the famous American beauty."

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To return. Visitors were late in coming that Thursday at Miss Ingelow's, but came in with a rush towards the close of the afternoon evidently on their way back from some entertainment in the neighbourhood. And probably it was a charitable entertainment—for as we passed through the house on our way back, we fell in with the Baroness Burdett-Coutts coming in, and the good lady had "Bazaar" writ upon her brow.

"Oh, yes, I opened one at the Town Hall this afternoon," said she, in response to our greeting, "and could not get away sooner. But it comforted me to think that I should have a chat afterwards with dear Miss Inglelow. Oh, you are not going?"

"We have had our chat," said Mary, with a little irrepressible exultation. "There was no one here when we came, nor for some time afterwards,—but now!—"

"Are there very many?" said the other, looking a little alarmed. "Oh dear!" She was paler than usual and it became her to be so. Usually her colour was too high, and her thin, pointed face was not beautiful, but the expression was always the same, calm, dignified, benevolent. I do not remember ever hearing her say anything remarkable—and I saw a good deal of her one winter at Mentone later on—but she always left an impression of quiet goodness that one did not forget. And she wore a wonderful green stone—what it was I do not know—a round, green ball, not, I think, an emerald—which blazed in the sun, and which also one did not forget. Otherwise it was only in the evening that her jewels were in any way remarkable.

"Well, I suppose I must go in as I am here," she considered after a pause during which I fancy she meditated a retreat. "But I wish I had come sooner. And I do wish such people as our dear friend here did not have 'Days.' 'Days' are always tiresome things—oh, must you go? But you will come to *my* next 'Day,' won't you?"

"Is it to be 'tiresome'?" said Mary, wickedly. But the baroness saw nothing.

"You will come to Holly Lodge next week at any rate? If only it is not like that dreadful day at Strawberry Hill! Good-bye—good-bye."

"Aggie went to that Strawberry Hill party," said Mary, as we drove away. "It took place on the very wettest afternoon last week; let me see, what afternoon was that?"

"Well—about the party?"—hinted I.

"It was terrible; Lady Waldegrave had never believed that it could rain for *her* party—her parties have always been so highly favoured by the weather, according to herself—and she had sent out invitations to everyone she knew. There were nearly a thousand people, Aggie said, and they would only have pleasantly filled the gardens if the gardens had been available—but as it was, the rain never ceased for a moment, and as there was not room in the house for half the number, planks were placed on the lawn, and the guests walked up and down under umbrellas waiting for their carriages and getting all their pretty frocks ruined.

"The crush was so great that some people had to wait over two hours before theirs could come up to the door. Poor Lady Waldegrave was so overcome by the horror of it, that she quite lost her head and kept walking about and exclaiming at intervals 'This is like a dreadful dream! I hope I shall wake up soon and find it *is* a dream!' which was not perhaps the most tactful remark in the world to make. And Aggie had her cloak stolen"; Mary added as an afterthought.

"Do you mean that? Really?"

"Really, truly. It was a new cloak too. She had only worn it once and thought it might be wanted if she went out-of-doors, but seeing there was no hope of going out-of-doors she left it in the cloakroom directly she arrived at the house. The cloakroom was a pandemonium when she came away and the cloak could not be found."

"And it has never been returned to her?"

"Never. And never will be. A shabby old thing of the same kind that was unclaimed by its owner was sent to her the next day,—but when she returned it saying there was a mistake she heard nothing further. No doubt Lady Waldegrave knew there was no use in making a fuss."

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Soon after this we had an opportunity of seeing whether guests at Holland Villas Road were as predatory in their instincts as those at Strawberry Hill.

Miss Ingelow had sent out invitations on a much more modest scale, but was still in an agony of nervous apprehension as the fateful day wore on and the rain as before never ceased. It was a very wet summer, and if we had a bright interval every now and again—as on the day when we had sat in the garden with the poetess—we paid for it afterwards.

The kindly Jean had asked everyone she knew, and the little house would have been filled to bursting if all or even the larger part had come—but they did not come.

"Don't you think she may be rather glad if we stay away?"—I had suggested,—truth to tell, with one eye to Miss Ingelow and one to myself. It was a hopeless afternoon, and yet if one goes anywhere in London, it matters not where, one has to put on nice clothes and dare the weather. I longed for an excuse to stay at home.

Not so Mary; clothes were nothing to her and she had some experience of Miss Ingelow's parties. "They are not very popular at the best of times, and to-day there will hardly be a soul there! They'll all shirk—all who—well of course there are some who won't, people of the baser sort, according to Harry's definition of them."

"What Harry? And what people?"

"A little Harry I know. He and his twin brother were having the New Testament read aloud to them, and Georgie was exercised in his mind about the 'Fellows of the baser sort who stirred up the populace against St. Paul.' 'Who are the baser sort?' he asked.

"'Why,' said Harry, promptly, 'the sort of people who come out of Preston, very third-rate people indeed!'"

"So that sort will be true to Jean when others won't?"

"Oh—*you* know," said Mary, laughing.

But when she had forced me into going, and we had hurried into Miss Ingelow's small domain under umbrellas, getting wet even in the brief transit from the gate to the door, we found that the loud steady rain had been too much even for the "Baser sort." One sturdy female was planted bolt upright upon an ottoman and one in a manner guarded the doorway—and that was the extent of the muster so far.

And poor, timid, anxious Jean who had been so fearful of overcrowding, so certain that every gangway would be blocked! It was *now* that she showed herself in her true and lovely colours. There was not a thought of mortification or vexation on her own account. Not for a moment did she lament the break-down of her party as *her* party, still less refer to the noble and eminent guests who ought to have been there and were not—she said very quietly and simply that she could not expect people to come so far —(and one had a feeling that she added to herself "When there is so little to come for")—but refrained.

And then she turned to Mary: "We will have our tea without waiting for anyone else!" and we five marched solemnly into the dining-room.

The set-out there almost moved me to tears. It was of the very best, so carefully, so prettily arranged, and alas! so plentiful! There was a novel delicacy that season yclept "Pistachio bread"—and when I saw among the other cakes and biscuits the pale pea-green colour with which pistachio nuts had made me familiar, a feeling of awe stole over my soul.

The rain lashed the roofs, the walls, the pavements. The front-door which should have stood open to admit a constant stream of guests, was closed to keep the matting dry within; the dining-room windows had to be open from the top only, and the ghastly travesty of a festival had to be carried on under these conditions!

I remember that the tea was hot and strong and gave us a little fillip. I remember that the two stalwart females who at first had been somewhat silent and pecked at the food on their plates, brightened up on being drawn into the general circle, (poor little general circle!) and grew quite loquacious; that Mary wore the most marvellous air of enjoyment and entire satisfaction, and that I ate so much pistachio bread that I have never been able to care for it since.

Jean herself looked meekly resigned; I think what she minded most was the disappointment to her servants. Their wistful looks out of the window when not attending to our wants touched their mistress in her tenderest part. She knew what planning, what arranging, what consulting had gone to the formation of this high festival, what magnitude it had assumed in their eyes.

When a carriage thundered up, and there was a responsive flutter, and Mary openly looked from the window—and when after a footman had hurried to and fro and still left the carriage-door unopened and finally indicated to the coachman the next-door house, and moved on with the carriage to its gate, we all felt the sting of shame.

We tried to rally, and took some ices.

There were four kinds of ices. No one said, no one thought there were too many; we should have blushed to suppose such a thing. What we did was each to take a separate kind, and the one who was over was quite flutteringly undecided as to which should have her casting vote?

Then another carriage came up, but we tried to take no notice of it. We affected absorption in our own affairs. We would not let ourselves down again by any show of excitement or expectation. Mary alone looked coolly out as before.

But she undid the cool effect by suddenly springing up with a joyful shout—"It's the Lehmanns!"—and with her own hands pushing into order that part of the table that had been disarranged.

"This *is* nice!" said she. "How lucky that we should have the dear Lehmanns all to ourselves!"—and she rattled merrily on.

And what a grateful look this gaiety drew from the one who best of all appreciated it!

"No one is quite like Mary;" whispered Miss Jean Ingelow to me as we passed out.

After this the party lifted up its head in a sort of half-hearted, deprecating way.

At one time there was quite a small rush, six people arriving at once from different quarters. All were ready to eat and drink, and a genial buzz made glad the poor maids' hearts. But although between twenty and thirty eventually turned up, it was—no I will not say what it was.

Mary folded her arms as we drove away. "I am so *glad* we were there!" she said.

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As I have no occasion to mention the Baroness Burdett-Coutts again, perhaps I may be permitted here to reproduce the lines I wrote at a later date on the burial of the widelyesteemed philanthropist in Westminster Abbey. They appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* the same evening—January 5th, 1907.

Since riches are the Tempter's weapon sure
  To try the heart and see if it be true,
Shall we not honour her who could endure
  A test accorded rarely, and to few?

Come then to this abode of ancient state—
  Thy holy consecration of vast power
Hath earned for thee a place among the great,
  And more, all England's sorrow in this hour.

L. B. W.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Millais, my boy, you must look to your laurels"—"Would there were more of such 'Ridiculous' humility!"—Mrs. Richmond Ritchie thinks there is nothing like living in the suburbs for finding oneself a celebrity—The Misses Shelley disdain to read their brother's "Immoral verses"—Lady Granville Gordon sets up a shop—We go to Colonel Grant's party "To meet Henry Stanley"—He is "Frog in the middle" of a dense crowd.

"THE speeches were desperately long and tiresome."

Such was the candid opinion of Sir Farrer Herschell delivered in private after the Academy dinner in 1881.

"I must tell you of Lord Houghton's little slip," he continued, laughing. "He was getting tired and bored and fell asleep during Matthew Arnold's dissertation. Arnold responded for literature, and Grove for science. Grove had given us quite a scientific lecture—as Houghton whispered in my ear, for I sat next him—and when Matthew Arnold followed in the same vein it was too much for the old gentleman and he dropped off.

"When he woke up, Arnold's speech was still going on, and Houghton felt drowsier than ever and renewed his complaints of this long-winded oratory into the ear of his neighbour on the other side. He said, 'Why, this speech is as tedious as the last!'—and who do you think he said it to? Grove himself! Poor Grove, who was so pleased with his own eloquence and smiling round at everybody! He left the table as soon as he decently could with all the starch taken out of him!"

"But I did hear a speech worth listening to," continued

Sir Farrer with animation, "at a dinner Sir Frederick Leighton gave to the Art Club a little while ago. Millais had to respond for the toast of 'Painting' and delighted everybody. Instead of treating us to the usual solemn platitudes he broke loose from convention and related a little story which conveyed most felicitously a compliment to Leighton, and one he could not help appreciating."

"Can't you tell us the story?" said Mary.

"Oh, if you care to have it, yes. And I'll try to remember as nearly as I can Millais' own words. He said: 'I was quite a young man when one day I was honoured by a call from William Makepeace Thackeray, who had come to ask me to dinner. I went, and when we were by ourselves in the evening, he read aloud a chapter of "Esmond" upon which he was then at work.

"'You may guess that was a great evening for me, and nothing of the kind occurred again to weaken the impression, for immediately afterwards I went to study art in Italy and did not see Thackeray again for two years.

"'Then I met him at the door of the Garrick club, when his first words were, "Millais, my boy, you must look to your laurels. I met lately one Leighton, a most accomplished young dog. Mark my words, one day he will be President of the Royal Academy."'

"('You should have heard the cheering at this,' Sir Farrer broke off to say, 'but the moment that we saw he had not done, we were ready for more.')

"'You may suppose I was not over-pleased at Thackeray's prediction,' continued Millais. 'I had never heard of Frederick Leighton, and in my youthful aspirations had thought that I might perhaps—just perhaps—one day myself be President.'

"(Then they cheered again; Millais is as popular as Leighton; but still we had not done with his story.)

"'And now,' he said, 'now, when Time has set his seal on that great man's prophecy, it is to me a very great privilege and happiness to acknowledge his wonderful perspicacity, and sometimes when the President of the Academy is distinguishing himself and conferring more than usual honour on his high position, I think I see a face well-known to every English reader looking at me with eyes twinkling through his old spectacles and hear the humorous triumph in his voice: "Aha, Millais my boy, I told you so!"'

"Well, that must have been charming," said Mary, thoughtfully. After a pause she added, "I wonder if Annie Ritchie has heard that?" And I felt within my bones that we should be taken to see Annie Ritchie within the next twenty-four hours.

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"The Sandersons are in Town," observed Sir Farrer, suddenly; "did you know that they were coming up to attend the Academy Soirée?"

(By this time Dr. Burdon-Sanderson was Regius Professor of Physiology at Oxford, hence his brother-in-law spoke of his "Coming up" with his wife to London.)

"I knew they were coming, but I did not know they had actually come," said Mary. "Two very different things with the Sandersons! I have given up asking them here, as they are so often stopped at the last minute. But I did suggest their sleeping here for the Soirée."

"And they didn't accept?"

"No; I forget why. I thought they would have been in by now to tell me about it."

"They were to leave early this morning," said he; "the wonder is they didn't leave last night."

"Leave last night? At midnight!"

"Oh, it would not have been midnight: it would not have been much past nine o'clock."

"Come, there is something behind this," said Mary, settling herself for enjoyment of the something, "what is it? Why should the Sandersons come up for the Soirée if they did not mean to go to it?"

Sir Farrer laughed and looked from one to the other. "They meant to go sure enough," he said, "it was a tremendous effort, but they had wound themselves up to make it, and taken rooms at the Burlington Hotel, and Ghetal was quite smartly dressed—"

"You saw them then?"

"I spent most of the evening with them, but if I had shirked the Soirée and gone off to Lady Percival's party as I very nearly did, the Sandersons would not have graced the Academy rooms with their presence either."

"How? Tell us how?"

"They had forgotten their tickets! Left them behind at Oxford!"

"How stupid! Still, with a man of John Sanderson's prestige—"

"So any one but John Sanderson would have thought. And even if he didn't think of it for himself, Ghetal should for him. You would hardly believe it possible but those two turned back of their own accord at the entrance to the rooms, and were coming sorrowfully down the staircase again when I met them. If I had not met them—or if no one with a grain of commonsense had met them—they would have been out of the place, back to their hotel, and off to Oxford on the spot!"

"But how absurd! How ridiculous!"

"Of course, but I could hardly get them to see it. I said to John, 'Your visiting-card would have been sufficient.'

"He said he had not one about him.

"But an envelope, a letter, anything to show who you were, would have done! You had only to write your name on a slip of paper and send it in to the President, or to *anybody*. I really girded at him, but dear me, he would not for the world have taken the liberty! Just as we were arguing the point I caught sight of Leighton, who at once rose to the occasion. Certainly he has charming manners. He not only escorted the Sandersons in, but introduced all sorts of notabilities to them. I had to take them out of his range at last, for his eye was continually going round to them and they were evidently on his mind. He told me afterwards that he was immensely struck with John. He thought John had one of the finest countenances he had ever seen—and Ouless said the same. Ouless is to paint John's picture for the College of Surgeons, I believe. But wasn't it carrying humility a bit too far, that affair of the tickets? Ridiculous, wasn't it?"

"Oh, ridiculous," said Mary.

But in my secret soul I thought, "Would that there were a little more of this 'Ridiculous' humility in the world!"

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As foreseen we trotted down to Wimbledon the following day to see the Richmond Ritchies. They had a house on a pleasant part of the common and the fine air and quiet had done Mrs. Ritchie much good since I last saw her, at which time she was suffering a good deal from headaches.

Not that she is by any means secluded even on Wimbledon Common, for people kept coming in and going out all the time, and as civil things were said to me as well as to her, she whispered aside with a roguish look on her sweet face—(doubtless a counterpart of her father's famous twinkle)—"There is nothing like living in the suburbs for finding oneself a celebrity!"

When we sat around in basket chairs upon the lawn we had much pleasant talk and Mary told her tale. I *think* Mrs. Ritchie has heard it already—such anecdotes always fly round—but she was far too well-mannered to let it appear unless one were on the look-out for it as I was—and she was certainly pleased to have it brought to her afresh.

She on her part told us an amusing little story about her husband when a boy. When at Eton he came up on one occasion to spend the day with Thackeray (her father) and his family. Directly the little fellow entered the room in which they were sitting, he settled himself down in a window-seat, and drawing a book from his pocket apologised with due politeness for doing so, but immediately became absorbed in it.

Presently he looked up. "I hope you don't mind my reading, but I bought this book at the station, and it is such a jolly book I really can't put it down."

"What book is it?" inquired some one.

"It is called 'The Book of Snobs.' It's by Titmarsh. And it *is* a jolly book."

Thackeray, who was walking up and down the room, came to a pause at this, and putting his hand on the reader's shoulder looked over to see if he had heard correctly? Then he smiled contentedly. "I take it as a great compliment, my boy, that you find that book so interesting, for—I wrote it!"

"But to own the honest truth," said Thackeray's daughter, laughing, "I don't think Richmond was very much impressed. It was nothing to him who wrote the book, all he cared for was to be left alone to devour it!"

Mrs. Ritchie then asked Mary about a visit she had paid shortly before to the Misses Shelley at Brighton. They are the sisters of the poet, but do not appear to set any value on this. Evidently he is not "*My brother*" to them.

"We found we had to tread delicately even if his name seemed within measurable distance of being mentioned"; said Mary, "—especially with Miss Margaret Shelley, who is prickly and perverse on most subjects, and with her it is not only a case of belittling the prophet in his own country, but of denying that there ever was a prophet at all. Once in answer to the question 'Are you a sister of the poet Shelley?'—she first stared blankly, then appeared to have a sudden recollection and drew herself up to her full height. 'I once had a brother who I believe wrote immoral verses, but I am thankful to say I have never read any of them.'

"Never a word said Miss Helen Shelley though," continued Mary. "She is mildness itself compared with Miss Margaret, and just went on pouring out the tea as if she had heard nothing. My belief is that she knew some of those 'Immoral verses' very well; I should not be surprised to hear that she could say them by heart."

"I wish we had had her at a party I was at lately then," said Mrs. Ritchie, "where recitations were the order of the day, and they were really too doleful. It was at the Pfeiffers; they have a charming garden, and Mrs. Pfeiffer has just designed a new Greek garment which I daresay she thought would look well in it. Her cloak of olive green plush floated about very picturesquely.

"However I was tired and sat down underneath the tree where the recitations were to be. I cannot *tell* you what they were like! They reached a climax when one weird-looking creature with a yearning throat—too 'Intense' for anything—started on 'The Earl's Daughter!'

"Well, I suppose most of us *have* read 'Oh, the earl was fair to see!'—considering that it is one of Tennyson's most effective sketches executed with a few masterly strokes of the pen; but when one knows every word, and the reciter doesn't—"

"Did she not even know the words?"

"Twice or thrice she said the wrong ones; then she hesitated, looked this way and that, muttered some excuse and began the verse again.

"Then the same thing happened. She had the book in her hand and consulted it. Then she tried afresh. Finally she announced that she was so put out by the flickering of the leaves and the twittering of the birds that she could remember no more. We were all infinitely obliged to her, but as we saw her surreptitiously conning the pages of her book behind a tree, we quailed as we realised that only the birds and the leaves stood between us and an awful doom."

"How was little Mr. Pfeiffer?"—said Mary.

"I asked him, and he said, 'I keep myself well in this way. I get up at five-thirty and take a hot bath—a bath hot enough to boil a lobster in—then I take a cold bath, a fine, fresh cold bath—then I fling open the window and take an air bath—and after that I feel ready for anything.'"

"Ready for anything? That poor, little, ricketty creature!"

"He assured me that if everybody followed this plan there would be far fewer doctors' bills to pay," said Mrs. Ritchie. "He may not be much of an advertisement for his fad, but he has it all the same. We all have our fads, you know."

"Those Miss Shelleys of whom we were speaking," said Mary, "they told me that theirs is walking. No doubt Miss Margaret sets the pace and poor Miss Helen toddles along as she can. Miss Margaret said to John, 'If we did not walk five or six miles every day we should at once sink down into being old women.'"

"Five or six miles!" echoed Mrs. Ritchie. "Then I must have sunk down into being an old woman before I was a young one, for I never walked five or six miles a day in my life."

"And these sisters are seventy-eight and seventy-nine years of age," said Mary—"but tell us"—she turned to me—"about your friend who has no shoes."

This sounded such a disreputable friend to have that I hastily explained that it was Mrs. Washington-Hibbert, one of the best-known women in London to whom she referred, and that Mrs. Hibbert's lack of one of the necessities of life did not proceed from poverty.

"But has she really no shoes?" said Mrs. Ritchie, incredulously.

"No walking-shoes. Boots one could understand. I don't believe Mary does much in the boot line," said I; "but she does possess shoes that can be worn out-of-doors. Mrs. Washington-Hibbert does not—or says she does not. She was staying in the same house with us for Easter, and everyone was going out one morning to see a view from a hill in the park. Quite a little hill, but too steep for any vehicle to go up, so Mrs. Hibbert elected to stay at home. But a brother of mine who was much delighted with the racy old lady, tried to persuade her to change her mind.

"She was flattered and fenced with him a little—but at last the truth came out. She had no shoes to walk in. 'These are the only kind I ever wear,' she said, and stuck out a pair of tiny feet encased in lavender silk slippers.

"He could not think what to say; he owned he was quite flabbergasted and only tried to mutter, 'But what do you do when you walk?'

"'I never do walk!—she cackled in her high, thin voice. 'I have not walked for years; and these and others like these are the only shoes I possess.' She also told him that although she occasionally paid a country visit or went to the sea, her husband had not slept out of London for forty years.

"You may see them driving together in the Park any day of the week all the year round," continued I, "but I never pass their carriage now without thinking of the lavender silk slippers."

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"I want to look in at Madame Lière's," said Mary, one afternoon; "I promised Lord Granville Gordon I would, and I really need some new bonnets."

"What in the world do you mean?" said I.

"Don't you know who Madame Lière is? Why, Lady Granville Gordon! You have met the Gordons at our house."

"Certainly. But that still does not explain Madame Lière and the bonnets."

"I'll tell you as we go along," said Mary; so she gave the direction—in Park Street—and we went along. "The Gordons are as poor as they can well be," Mary then began, folding her arms and leaning forward upon them in her favourite attitude, "for there are twelve of the family besides the head of it, Lord Huntly. The wonder is how they get along at all. But these ones, the Granvilles, don't sit down under it; they are pretty clever, at least she is, and he is no fool. He saw her trimming a bonnet for herself and said, 'Why don't you trim bonnets for other people and make money by it?'

"'I will, if you give me leave?' said she.

"At first he did not think her in earnest, but as she held to it, he grew serious also, and between them they hatched the idea.

"They went out together and found a tiny shop in Park Street—(where we are going now)—and he looked after the hiring of it, and furbished it up, and she made a couple of dozen bonnets. When the house was ready they had 'Madame Lière' put up over the door—why 'Lière,' I don't know—and now we all have to go and buy bonnets there."

"Do you think it will answer?"

"It may; while it is a novelty of course it will—but the question after that will be, will Lady Granville stick to it? Will she endure the drudgery, the confinement?

People not born in the working-class have no conception of how galling this becomes—at least I am told so—for I had an argument with a poor girl who had tried and failed.

"She said that for a time there was a sense of excitement which buoyed her up—and in the winter she did not mind being boxed up all day within doors—but as the spring and summer came round and her friends were all flying about doing the things she used to do and going to the places she used to go to, there came over her such a sense of desolation that she could hardly bear it.

"They had all stood by her at the beginning, but after a while they got tired of it. She felt that she was being looked upon as a charity—in plain terms a nuisance. She was almost sorry to see anyone she knew come into the shop."

"Poor thing!"

"You need not pity her *now*," said Mary. "I was horrified when I heard she had thrown up the whole thing, and flew to see what I could do to put things straight. I thought her mad to give up her one means of livelihood however irksome it might be—but my dear, I found Adele radiant!"

"What had happened?"

"What happens in novels, but very, very seldom in real life. An old relation had died and left her not exactly a fortune, but enough to make shop-keeping unnecessary. When last I heard of her she was living in the country quite happily, and once more going about like her sisters, her cousins, and her aunts. Here we are!"—as we stopped at the tiny shop in Park Street.

"Do you see?" said Mary, putting down her parasol and preparing to alight. "There are the Royal Arms. That is new since I was here last. The Princess of Wales had given leave for it then, but Madame Lière did not know when she would be able to get the thing made."

"You have been here before, then?"

"Only for a minute, to see if I could do anything to help. I got some cards and distributed them."

"Why, those cards took you all round London," exclaimed I, suddenly recollecting how sick of the sight of them I had been. "Were they Madame Lière's?"—

"Hush, yes! They did *some* good perhaps—but anyway I have got to buy bonnets to-day,"—and we went inside.

Lady Granville was there, and as it was getting late and shopping hours were nearly over we found her alone and could talk.

She seemed in very good heart and hopeful of the success of her venture. Her eyes sparkled as Mary chose bonnet after bonnet. She always told us if it were made by herself or by her maid who had also a talent that way, and had thrown in her lot with her mistress.

Privately I thought the maid's bonnets the best of the two, and though Mary bought them impartially she owned afterwards that she felt the same.

"But then of course that was not what I went for," said she. "I don't *very* much care for any of them and they will soon disappear. Did you hear about my last Worth gown?"—she demanded suddenly.

"What about it?"

"It—well, it is at the present moment adorning the person of a starving vicar's wife in the wilds of Cumberland—that is to say if she has not sold it, which would be the only wise thing for her to do."

"But—Mary!"

"Yes, indeed; a fifty guinea silk on a poor thing who has never had fifty guineas of her own in her life, and probably has no idea of the gown's value!"

"But how? Why? What made you do it?"

"*I* did not do it, it was Elizabeth's cleverness. She is really past her work you know, and already the maid I have under her does nearly everything, but the poor old fumbler loves to think she does, so I give her odd jobs, and the other day when Worth's box arrived I told her to keep the box, for sending off a collection of useful garments to the poor dear in Cumberland. I keep a good many of them going, but she is my latest. Well, what does the sapient Elizabeth do but put the old Worth beside the new—both black silks and without much difference between them to the uninitiated—side by side on the bed, and then packs off the new one! If it hadn't been for my being in mourning I shouldn't have minded so much!"

But she must have minded. The new gown was wanted for a special occasion, a very small and select affair to which she was able to go despite her mourning—and would not anyone have been provoked by a blunder which after all *was* a blunder and a stupid one? I bethought me of an old anecdote but forebore to mention it. I will tell it now as it may be new to some people.

A well-to-do but "near" Scotch buddy had dropped into the Sunday plate at church a sovereign by mistake for a sixpence, and made a grab to take it back, but the plate was whipped away. "Weel, weel," said he, "I'll maybe get credit for it in heaven."

"Get credit for the sovereign? Na," said the plate-hander, promptly. "Na, Geordie; ye'll only get credit for the saxpence."

Mary perhaps might only get credit for the old Worth on the present occasion, but she could afford to dispense with more, there were so many credits to her account.

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As she was in mourning she could not go to an interesting party the same evening which otherwise she would not have missed for the world.

It was a reception given to meet Henry Stanley, the

African explorer, by Colonel Grant, the discoverer of the source of the Nile—and it was *the* event of the moment.

By the next year—or week—fashionable London would not have stirred an inch to see Stanley or any other "Freak of Nature" according to Corney Grain, who had a very funny little piece on the subject—but the very latest draw was the stout little hero of the wilds, whom the other and older hero had caught for fashionable London's delectation.

Other houses were deserted that night—such houses as had had the misfortune to have unwittingly fixed upon it for their own entertainments. These were by no means so multifarious as they are now, and there were really no counter-balancing attractions of any consequence to draw off the surplus of the crowd in Upper Grosvenor Street.

What that crowd was many can still remember. Of whom it was composed I can only say that it would be easier to say who were *not* there, than who were. People left their carriages at the Marble Arch, at Hamilton Place, at Hanover Square—well, this may be an exaggeration (for one could not be in three places at once), but I know that my husband and I approaching on foot by back-ways found the whole neighbourhood teeming with pedestrians in light attire, and it took us ages to get up to the door.

It was a warm summer night, and as we encountered many friends to while away the slowness of our progress we found nothing to cavil at—only by midnight we should have been glad to turn our backs on it all and go off Stanley-less. There seemed no chance of fighting our way through the wedge in the house.

Several did give up the ghost (of hope) and fled, content no doubt to say to each other, "We were at the Stanley party" without entering into particulars—and we might have followed their example but for a voice hailing us which I had not heard for years.

It was that of Sir Alexander Moncrieff—the inventor of the "Moncrieff Gun-carriage"—a brother officer of my brother Sir Alan Colquhoun. He had come all the way from Perthshire to see Stanley, or as he confided "To see Grant showing off Stanley!" "Grant is *such* a good fellow," said he, and stopped suddenly.

But he would not let us go without accomplishing our purpose. "Oh, you must come on *now*," he exhorted over the banisters, "after all you have gone through, you can't be allowed to be faint-hearted now. It will be worth it." And then Sir Alexander did a very nice thing. He wriggled himself down to the hall again and shared our meaner position, and as we had plenty to talk about we managed to endure the step-by-step ascent presently.

Well, the great moment came at last and I see it still before me.

But really I do not know what made it so great. Henry Stanley did undoubtedly succeed in a great undertaking, but he did not in any way impress one as a great man.

A space had been cleared in the front drawing-room, and in the centre of it turned and twisted the little explorer looking for all the world like "Frog in the Middle!" He was all smiles and bows and shakes of the hand,—looking as he no doubt felt exceedingly proud and gratified by such an ovation—but to my mind he had a hard, cruel, relentless face, and an uneasy eye.

I wondered. Did he feel by what an uncertain tenure he held the world's esteem? Would things come out presently that would change its gracious front to one of indignation and contempt? Would the upright, noble-hearted Grant who was so entirely effacing his own claims to notice in favour of his rival on that memorable evening, would he one day wince at the sound of Stanley's name?

Sir Alexander Moncrieff, known to his old friends as "Crieffie"—and just such another simple yet talented soldier as Grant—shared I fancy the misgivings I have hinted at here, and I never heard of Stanley's being invited to the latter's beautiful Scottish home. My husband, ever inclined to mercy, demurred at our strictures—but Sir Alexander's last words as he bade us farewell at our own door were, "All very well, Walford, but I must say I agree with your wife!"

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One brief word about Colonel Grant. It shall be very brief. It was such a little thing to notice, and yet it was just the proverbial straw which showed the delightful nature of the man.

I was being shown by him through a back-door into the little garden behind their house where coffee was to be brought us after luncheon one day, when I stumbled over a small hair-trunk, very old and worn.

"Oh, that trunk!" exclaimed Mrs. Grant, "why *will* you leave it there, my dear?"—to her husband. "I have asked so often to have it removed."

"It is doing no harm there," said he.

"Indeed it is. You saw how it got in the way just now."

"I hope you are not hurt?"—he turned quietly to me.

I was not, but thought within myself that it *was* an awkward place for a sharp-edged obstacle to be placed, and that Mrs. Grant, nice, motherly woman, was right in her complaint. Some one else might not get off so cheaply as I had.

The colonel stooped his tall frame and pulled the trunk into what he considered a safer place—but the next person to knock against it was himself.

"Really, my dear," began his partner's admonishing voice again—but she stopped and changed the subject. "It was all the luggage he had with him on his great Nile expedition," she whispered after he had moved aside,

—"and I am sorry I spoke. He likes it to be there because he thinks it looks as if it were going to be packed once more. Old as he is, he would go off again to-morrow if he had the chance! It always touches me to see him looking at that trunk, but I forgot for the moment."

After a few minutes she slipped her hand through his arm and looked into his face. And I knew the little trunk would remain where it was till the end of time.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A French governor's bid for popularity falls flat—Sir Farrer Herschell describes The Lord Mayor's Banquet—Did not appreciate the turtle soup—Colonel Warren would fain go a cruise in the "Challenger"—But has other fish to fry—Tells of his excavations under Jerusalem—Sir David Gill's Scotch minister—Cleverly extricates himself from a difficulty—"Sir David loves society"—Colonel Warren's parting prophecy—It is fulfilled, and Mary and I robe the new Lord Chancellor.

We were talking about the wet summer which had played such havoc among the July garden-parties, when some friends of Mary's, just returned from abroad, said they would tell us of a party at which they had been present, whose wreckage must have exceeded even that of Strawberry Hill.

It was at Algiers, and there had not been a drop of rain for weeks, but just before the guests for M. Grévy's grand evening garden-party began to arrive a thunderstorm rent the air and—after that the deluge!

And six thousand invitations had been sent out, and nearly six thousand sulky offended people had agreed to come, but under protest.

They then proceeded to explain that M. Grévy, the giver of the feast, being the Governor of Algiers, was expected occasionally to make Algiers merry, but M. Grévy did not see the force of spending his money on anything so foolish and unprofitable.

He had had however a hint on the subject from his uncle, the President of the French Republic, who had heard rumours of general dissatisfaction—and as it does not do to disregard such hints from high quarters, he set to work to concoct a festal gathering on a scale, as he thought, to shut the mouths of the grumblers.

He imported workmen from Paris and they spent a week in erecting tents and coloured lamps and gorgeous decorations all over the palace gardens—and no one talked of anything else but the Governor's garden-party.

The upper ten were of course furious at finding the gathering was to be so very unselect, for everyone who could raise a decent coat to his back was to be made welcome,—but they said to each other that it would be no good to stay away themselves, so turning up their noses they went—but the rain went too, and got there before them!

It was simply impossible to go outside, for the gardens were in flood, the illuminations were put out, and the tents were sopping.

In the house pandemonium reigned, and poor Madame Grévy ordered supper to be served as soon as possible;—but numbers of the principal guests never got near the tables, for the rabble, seeing there was no fun to be got out of anything else, took possession of them, and some Arabs in particular sat down the moment they arrived, and continued eating and drinking all night.

At six in the morning poor Madame Grévy, quite worn out, went off to her bedroom at last, and what did she find there? One drunken soldier on her bed and another on the floor; streams of wine issuing from broken bottles in every direction, and chicken-bones strewn all over the place.

The wretched Governor was in like plight, as were all the people staying in the house—for every room had been invaded, and several had been looted into the bargain.

"Your experiences will hardly beat that!" said our friends.

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"And yet I have been at some festivities where the guests were very peculiar," said Sir Farrer Herschell, who was present. "At the Lord Mayor's Banquet, for instance. I went to it last November for the first time, and I must say it is a queer affair. I found myself in very close quarters with a stout lady in a velvet dress, which was evidently on her mind. Perhaps it was new for the occasion. As the waiters were knocking against us and thumping our backs every time they passed, she turned round and said angrily, 'Look here, my man, don't you do that again. Your soup will be all over my velvet dress in a minute. Don't stand behind *me*, stand behind *this gentleman*—' pointing to me with her fat fore-finger all over rings. No doubt she was one of the City dames, for she seemed quite at home, and told everybody about everything directly her mind was at ease about the turtle soup and her velvet gown. *My* velvet coat might be souped over, but that was nothing to her."

"Oh, you were in velvet too?"—said Mary.

"It is etiquette for the members of the Government to go in Court Dress, so I was in full fig, black velvet suit with lace ruffles, and buckled shoes. A sword, too. I thought myself rather smart, and so apparently did the gorgeous official who stood at the entrance of the library calling out the names, for when I gave mine he added of himself, 'The Right Honourable!'

"'No,' said I, 'only the Solicitor-General.'

"At which he seemed both surprised and troubled. '*Not* Right Honourable?' he murmured, looking me up and down—and then in a sort of half-hearted way he called out my very inferior appellation. I must own there were such swells present that his disdain was quite reasonable.

"After I had made my way to the dais at the end of the room through rows of people seated on either side—(old hands, I imagine, for they stared as though they had stared many times before)—I made my bow to the Mayor and Mayoress, and stood aside to watch the new-comers arrive. It was quite amusing, that part."

"I wish I had been there!" said Mary.

"I wish you had. But go another time. If you had been in England you could have gone with me last November; at it was, the lady's card sent me was wasted—but anyhow go another time. *You* would see a great deal more and hear a great deal more than *I* ever do. However I did hear two stodgy old gentlemen talking away rather amusingly. Said one to the other, 'Did you ride in the Procession this year, sir?'

"'Yes, sir. Yes, sir; I did.'

"'Ah. Very nice, I suppose?'

"'Very. Yes, sir; I have ridden in the Procession for seventeen years, and I must say I always enjoy it—always.' He thought for a moment, and added with renewed emphasis, '*Always*—I *must* say so. *It never palls!*'"

"I can't say I thought much of the banquet," continued Sir Farrer. "They had chaffed me at home about the enormous dinner I was going to eat, and said I ought to have no breakfast nor luncheon—in fact, that I should starve the whole day in preparation. But when I had had my soup, which I didn't particularly like, though I suppose it was the famous 'Green Turtle,' there was nothing very tempting. Certainly I saw no delicacies—and the noise and heat were intolerable. We were rattled through every course at a gallop, and had our plates snatched away half full, if we did but turn our heads aside for a moment. Of course it is not easy to do things comfortably for seven or eight hundred people all wanting to be waited on at once, and it seemed to me there were not half enough waiters."

"Mrs. Wills would have said there were seven or eight hundred 'waiters.' The other day she heard of a dinner-party of twenty-four, where there were only four waiters when she made that pun."

"Mrs. Wills?" said Sir Farrer.

"Robert Chambers' sister,—such a witty old dear. She heard that Miss Agnes Strickland complained of the crush of people at a Drawing-Room, and said she herself had crawled under a bench and let them sit on her! Quoth Mrs. Wills, 'It would not have been the first time that Agnes Strickland had been sat upon.' Don't you know Mrs. Wills?"

But as neither he nor anyone else present did, Mrs. Wills dropped out of the conversation.

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It turned upon a more interesting theme: a theme so interesting that often afterwards it recurred to my memory; and when a delightful book appeared, yclept "The Mighty Deep,"* I found with joy that it contained still more than was then known of the "Challenger," whose wonderful work among ocean depths was discussed among us Londoners that quiet Sunday evening on Mary's balcony.

The "Challenger" was sent out by the government in 1872. During three years and a half she cruised about the world, dipping her instruments, measuring the depths, studying the temperatures and bringing up from the ocean bed materials wherewith to judge the state of that dark nether world hidden from our eyes by intervening miles of water.

"The extraordinary thing is," said Colonel Warren, (afterwards Sir Charles Warren,) "that throughout the whole cruise never once has any single bone of Man been brought up!"

"That might well be in the great Pacific depths," observed someone, "but in the shallower waters it *is* strange."

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* By Miss Agnes Giberne.

"How deep is the greatest depth known?" inquired another.

"Two thousand feet deeper than the highest height," replied Colonel Warren, who was the principal authority present. "Mount Everest in the Himalayas is twenty-nine thousand feet high, but one Pacific depth is about thirty-one thousand feet deep. Now, I'll tell you one surprising announcement made by the 'Challenger' fellows," continued he, with animation, "if the whole ocean surface could be lowered six hundred feet there would be these curious results. At once the British Isles would cease to be islands and become part of the Continent of Europe. The Continents of Asia and North America would be united at the Behring Straits, Ceylon would be a part of India, and all places on the coasts of different countries would of course find themselves far inland. It is wonderful—only six hundred feet!"

"You don't think of joining in the next expedition?" said Mary.

"I have other fish to fry"; Colenel Warren roused himself from a momentary reverie; "if I hadn't—but it is no use thinking of it." He then proceeded to tell us about the other fish he hoped might be waiting for him in the Holy Land. Already he had fried a good many there.

In plain terms he had been superintending excavations under Jerusalem, and had done so very successfully, though at first he had had a hard time of it. He went armed with a firman from the Sultan directing that every assistance should be given him by the authorities, but as there was something wrong with the technical wording of the document, it had to be sent back to headquarters to be corrected; and it was *two years and a half* before it was returned to him!

Colonel Warren told himself that very likely it would never come at all, and being a man of resource, did all he wanted without it. The Pacha of Jerusalem gave him leave to dig a hole within fifty feet of the place he had originally asked the Sultan's permission to dig in. That was very nice and pleasant of the Pacha, but the gallant colonel went a little bit beyond his warrant, and dug away until he arrived at the exact spot by working underneath like a mole!

At this the dear, kind, amiable Pacha waxed very mad indeed, and forthwith despatched a trusty agent to descend into the hole and report what he saw.

But the trusty agent was not an unexpected visitor, and a chair of state was prepared for his reception. Moreover, the wily excavator had an equally wily subordinate who understood the workings of that chair. He held the ropes that lowered it into the hole, and the ropes twisted a little, as ropes will, and the English sergeant let them twist even a little more than they would have done of themselves.

The consequence was that just before the chair with the giddy and nervous emissary clinging to it for dear life reached the stopping place, a final twirl became absolutely necessary to correct all the other twirls—and when that chair stopped spinning there was nothing about spinning that its wretched occupant didn't know.

Green in the face, he looked this way and that, and had not the faintest notion where he was nor in what direction the path of duty lay!

"We will now proceed to the excavations," said Lieutenant Warren (as he then was).

A bow from the miserable Turk. He could not speak.

"We are now walking towards the Harem Area," said the Englishman.

"Harem" anything no doubt sounded attractive to the other, but still he felt a trifle suspicious, and on that suspiciousness his artful guide had reckoned.

He knew that *whatever* he said would not be believed—so hazarded the truth, and the truth did the trick for him. The unfortunate inspector was absolutely bewildered in his geography, but was firmly convinced that the English infidel was telling lies, so he wheeled right about and insisted on being taken further and further from the sacred precincts of the "Harem Area," which he had been expressly sent to investigate.

Naturally he found nothing incriminating, and the authorities, chuckling to themselves, gave permission for Lieutenant Warren to excavate as much as he pleased "*in that direction.*"

On which Lieutenant Warren chuckled too.

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"Now, let me tell Sir David Gill's story of Nineveh," said Mary. "Nineveh and Jerusalem are sort of cousins, you know, so this is quite appropriate to follow Colonel Warren's tale of his circumventing the Turks in Jerusalem."

Whether it were appropriate or not we were ready to hear it.

"I wish I could give you Sir David's broad Aberdonian accent," said Mary, "he has it still, though he has been so long away from his native land, and no one can tell a Scotch story better—but you must put up with my feeble efforts. A certain minister in the far North gave out a text for his Sabbath morning's discourse, in which reference was made to Nineveh, and thus began: 'This great city of Nineveh, my brethren, was situated—' here he forgot where it was situated, hemmed and hawed, and started afresh.

"'My brethren, the great city of Nineveh, mentioned in our text, was situated on the banks of—' here he paused again; this start was worse than the other, for since he had spoken of 'Banks,' he was committed to a river or a lake or the sea, and could not for the life of him tell which to select.

"Off he started again, and with more circumlocution approached the fateful point.

"'My brethren, no city mentioned in Holy Scripture played in its day a more important part than did the ancient city of Nineveh, referred to in our text. It was inhabited by a great and powerful people, and was situated—here a glorious thought came to his aid—it was situated,' he said confidently, 'just where the Almighty in His Providence was pleased to situate it!'"

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"You stayed with the Gills at Capetown, didn't you?" asked Colonel Warren, presently. "It must be very interesting staying with an astronomer at an observatory."

"I suppose so, yes," said Mary, doubtfully.

Then she laughed outright. "We saw very little of the astronomer and still less of the observatory! Sir David loves society, and goes out a great deal when he comes home on leave, but directly he is back at work there is an end of him. So far as people who are not astronomically inclined are concerned, he might as well not exist!"

"I don't understand that," said the soldier, thoughtfully, "how a man can be a drivelling society man—"

"Who is a drivelling society man?" inquired Sir Farrer Herschell, turning suddenly round from a conversation he had been having aside. "*Gill?* Oh, Lord!"

"Well, I thought I understood as much," Colonel Warren looked at Mary. I thought you said, 'Sir David loves society'?"

"When he is away on holiday," explained she. "But I expect what he really loves is the feeling that he is recuperating in order to get back strong and fresh to his work."

"How a man can recuperate in that way!" muttered her military friend.

"It is all a matter of taste," said Mary. "It is a rest to some people to go among their kind, talk and laugh, and throw off whatever has burdened their minds in the daytime,—"

"—That's for you," said I, to Sir Farrer.

"Yes. She hits me off exactly," returned he.

"And *you* are able to throw things off your mind in that way?" Colonel Warren turned to look with something of incredulity and yet with something of envy too, at the other's placid face.

"I empty my mind as I do my pockets, when I have no longer any present use for its contents," said Sir Farrer.

"And did Sir David empty his mind, too?" demanded the soldier, after a moment's rumination. Evidently it puzzled him that two such men could pursue what he held to be so contemptible a course.

"When he was last in London," said Mary, "I met this Astronomer Royal at a young people's dance, where he never sat down and was the last guest to leave,—when I found him at home in his observatory in Capetown you would have thought he never cared to speak to anybody under the age of a star, or a planet at the very least!"

"Humph! Well, you had Lady Gill to go about with, you would not miss him?"

"Lady Gill is charming but a sad invalid—I missed Sir David very much," said Mary. "If it had not been for the continual coming and going of astronomers and other scientists from all parts of the globe, I should not have known what to do with myself,—but I admit it was exciting to see a cartload of strange people turned out at the door, and not to know from what end of the earth they had come! And Sir David had to be a little human with them at first, even if they all grew engrossed in 'Shop' talk afterwards. But it is a strange life to lead," she wound up, thoughtfully.

Her guests rose to go. "Well, I suppose I shall be off to some 'Shop' work or other soon now," said Colonel Warren, bidding Good-bye. "I don't know exactly when, and still less where. I never do know—that's part of the fun."

"But then how can you be prepared?" said Mary.

"My wife keeps a kind of general kit always in readiness. If there is anything special needed, it can be got at the Stores. The Stores are wonderful—one gets every mortal thing there. I can be ready in a couple of hours to start for anywhere."

He then went round the circle, and stood for a moment in front of the Solicitor-General. "When I return from my next job," he said, "you will be sitting on the Woolsack."

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It was a true prophecy. Lord Herschell had been there a year before Sir Charles Warren turned up again from the East.

One bright morning Mary and I had each a hasty summons from Grosvenor Gardens: "Can you come and robe me for my first Drawing-Room?—" and of course we went. We had assisted many a fair lady to don her Court train—(it was the thing in those days to go and see each other dressed on Drawing-Room mornings, as well as to do a round of teas afterwards,)—but to help a Lord Chancellor into his state robe was something new, and we were flattered to find no one but ourselves had been invited.

The ceremony was to take place in one of the lower rooms. "For I really couldn't undertake to get downstairs in that huge tarpaulin," said Lord Herschell, looking askance at it. "Feel its weight!"

The weight was fearful. The man who held it up for our inspection seemed relieved to put it down again. It was made of the richest, stiffest black brocade, thickly embroidered with gold acorns and leaves—which embroidery went all down the front, round the neck, and a little way down the back.

It stopped below the shoulder-blades—perhaps the designer pitied his victim?

But for over a yard the cloak swept the floor behind, and what purpose was served by this extra length and cumbrousness it would have been difficult to say, for that yard added nothing to the dignity of the wearer and much to his discomfort—but when I inquired, "How does your Magnificence propose to hold up this Court Train?"—the Lord Chancellor explained that it was held up for him.

"*You* haven't to carry it over your arm, but we have, we poor women without half your strength!" cried I—and thought it very unfair.

"Still I think even your hard heart would melt at the sight of me after a few hours of this," quoth he. "I expect it will need all my fortitude to bear up till Her Majesty has done with me. Remember it is only while I am moving about that this confounded train is carried by an official, and while I am standing still opposite the Queen for as long as the Drawing-Room lasts, my own shoulders must bear the brunt. They say it is to be a very full Drawing-Room too," he added, ruefully; "I inquired yesterday at the Chamberlain's office, and the list is tremendous."

"And as long as you are in office you will have to attend every Drawing-Room?—" said Mary. "Is the same expected of a Chancellor's wife?"

"No. She only needs to go twice a year. But Aggie wouldn't mind that," pronounced he. "She likes functions. Shall we go up and see her? She ought to be about ready by now."

We wondered if there were time, as the carriage was already at the door, but he assured us there was ten minutes to spare. He wanted, I think, to show off his wife at her best, and no wonder. She was a beautiful woman; and though I had often seen her before in Drawing-Room attire, I thought her present dress of sapphire blue pre-eminently becoming to her fair complexion and golden hair. Her train was of blue velvet—I put it on for her—she had put on my first Court train for me.

"There. Now we must go down," said Lord Herschell, marshalling his little party, now reinforced by the three children, to the door. "Now for taking the world on my shoulders, Freda!"—to his little eldest daughter, as he signalled to the ushers in attendance to bring forward the robe.

He was cheerful, composed, dignified, yet a slight abstraction of mind seemed to indicate he was not wholly at ease.

It was not a formidable part he had to play at the forthcoming ceremonial, it would have seemed a simple one—but he had never played it before, and he was a man who, whatever he undertook to do, liked to do it *well*. I noticed that he was carefully thinking things over and considering if he had got his lesson perfect?

Mary admired the splendidly-embroidered bag containing the Great Seal of office.

For a moment Lord Herschell did not seem to hear her, then suddenly he wheeled round, all attention.

"Yes, it is exquisite; look here—and here,—" and he pointed out the intricacies of the stitch as though to the manner born.

For without being petty-minded, there never was a man who had a keener interest in little things than this great and wise judge. To the last day of his life he would be amused with a child's display of birthday gifts, or the feminine results of a day's shopping;—while if he approved a dress or hat, the article in question was hallmarked for its wearer.

"Now be merciful," he adjured, as Mary and I lifted the black and gold monster and solemnly adjusted it. "Thank you, and thank you,—" to each. The ushers then finished him off, and with his gloves in his hand he stood for a minute looking at us with a new expression on his face.

The men left the room. We felt—I did—and I am sure the others did—that something different from all this was coming. "I hope," said the new Lord Chancellor very seriously, "I hope to follow the example of the Lord Chancellor you told me about,—" and he took Mary's hand,—"I hope I shall—I hope I shall."

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"What did he mean by that?" said I, as we drove away. "What Lord Chancellor was he alluding to?"

She had been affected, and wiped a tear from her eye. "It was Lord Cairns," she said. "One of the best men that ever lived. In the midst of state worries and anxieties that would have driven many a Lord Chancellor to desperation, he kept an unruffled brow and serene aspect,—and at last one of the Ministers remarked, 'I can't think how Lord Cairns can keep so calm. He is every whit as uneasy as the rest of us at the turn events are taking, but to look at him one would think he was in smooth waters all round.'

"Lord Cairns came into the Council Chamber at the moment, and the speaker frankly repeated what he had been saying.

"As frankly did the other respond: 'Every morning I take my cares and troubles to my Heavenly Father, and ask for His help, counsel and guidance,—and having done *that*, why should I be worried and anxious about anything?'"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A new invention—Mr. Justin Hannen "will *not* go to see it"—Invites me to sit near him on the Bench at the Parnell Commission—A cruel cross-examination—The face of a fanatic—Mrs. Gladstone chumps her biscuits—Dramatic scene on the announcement of Pigott's flight—Parnell as known to his intimates—Cecil Rhodes' admiration of him—Miss Edith Rhodes, and *her* "My brother"—A lover who turned "Brushes" to account—Lord Sherbrooke's friend who will "still be a precious fool!"

"Do come and see the new invention," cried a shrill young voice. A new invention is a new invention, and I was always ready to see anything, but was loth to stir on the present occasion.

"We are very comfortable where we are," asserted my companion.

He was a learned judge and I but a budding novelist, and there were many years between us—but Mr. Justice Hannen was a pleasant person to sit with over a little tea-table set in a garden lit with the golden haze of a glorious September afternoon. A brilliant tangle of flower-beds was around us, and gaily dressed groups flitted hither and thither in the background.

The occasion was a wedding in an old Yorkshire Hall; and the wedding was over and the guests free to disport themselves.

They had found amusement by stretching a cotton thread from one end of the spacious lawn to the other, and talking along it to each other—it was the first faint spectre of the telephone.

But Sir James Hannen declined to be interested in the cotton thread, and refused to budge when summoned. "I will *not* go to see it," he maintained, doggedly; and at length our persecutors left us in peace, and we sat on till the light waned. "You have made a conquest of the old fellow!" laughed my husband afterwards.

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But I did not see my "Old fellow" for many a day thereafter, and then only met him by chance on a few occasions, so that it was a very great surprise to receive one evening a note asking if we would care to have seats "In Court" on the following day when Sir James Hannen "Thought the case in hand might be interesting"? Sir James further added that his son would be in readiness to receive and conduct us to our places.

Now, "The case in hand" was the Parnell Commission! It was *the* event of the moment, and everybody was mad to be at it. To have an order sent spontaneously was luck indeed!

Unfortunately my husband was absent at one of those eternal Directors' Meetings I have already alluded to—but a brother who happened to be staying with us was cheerfully ready to see that it was "Not lost what a friend got," and accordingly we two started bright and early for the Law Courts one February morning in 1887.

As the present generation, unless politicians, may be hazy in their minds as to what the famous "Parnell Commission" was, I will say a few words about it.

The *Times* had published an autograph letter signed "Charles S. Parnell," to the effect that though the writer regretted the accident of Lord Frederick Cavendish's death, he maintained that Burke got no more than his deserts—and the uproar caused by such a shameful avowal of opinion may be imagined.

It flew like wildfire over the land—and report had it that the Irish leader himself was the only person in England who by evening either knew nothing of the matter, or feigned not to know.

A friend in the House of Commons showed him a copy of the paper. The friend expected an explosion of wrath—"Damnation!—" "—Infamous!—" "Scoundrel!—" or the like;—all Parnell did was to point composedly to a piece of carelessness on the part of the writer; "I have not turned the letter *S* in that way," he said, "for ten years."

Afterwards indeed the Irish blood in his veins boiled up, and he spoke out, wondering how a "Responsible and what used to be a respectable journal could have been so hoodwinked, so hoaxed, so bamboozled as to publish such an audacious and unblushing fabrication."

Naturally the *Times* authorities did not like being told that they had been hoodwinked, hoaxed and bamboozled, and though considering it beneath their dignity to recriminate, they printed further articles on "Parnellism and Crime," which forced the Irishman to take action. Finally a Special Commission was appointed to inquire into the matter, and of the three judges to preside over it Sir James Hannen was the principal one.

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My brother and I were met in the outer hall of the Law Courts by Mr. Henry Hannen, and conducted by him to such a prominent position that we fairly hung our heads to be there!

Who were we to be seated at our ease with eye-glasses and opera-glasses levelled at us, when there were Presidents, Governors, and Commanders-in-Chief, lords spiritual and temporal squeezing together in a huddled mass on back benches, glad to sit upon anything, glad to screw themselves in through the doorway?

"There is the Lord Justice General," whispered my brother. "I travelled up with him from Scotland last night!"

"And there is the Archbishop of Canterbury," whispered I, back. "And the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, and the President of the Academy, and the Comptroller of the Navy,—and—and—" we each found some well-known face every minute.

But we soon lost interest in everything but the business of the hour, and being fairly well up in it beforehand, we needed no one to inform us as to its crucial points.

Mr. Macdonald, the Manager of the *Times*, was to be put into the witness-box that day. Parnell had also said, "We must put the man who forged that letter into the witness-box, and wring the truth out of him."

By the time we saw this wretch the truth very nearly had been so wrung, it only needed the confirmation of others, and he saw this confirmation gradually closing him in. He may have tried to brazen it out at first, but by the time Sir Charles Russell had him in the grip of those talons which were seldom if ever known to lose their hold, he realised that hope was over.

Shall I ever forget his face? Despair, grim, awful despair had settled down upon it. A livid hue had overspread every feature, the veins on the forehead were swollen almost to bursting, and the nostrils rose and fell with every respiration. When he tried to speak he could with difficulty articulate.

One could hardly help feeling pity for a fellow-creature in such straits, albeit brought thereto by his own hand—and I avoided looking at Pigott as much as curiosity would let me.

I had another person to look at and one infinitely more interesting.

Mr. Parnell had a wonderful face—the face of a fanatic;

—there was dreamy beauty, pathos, mingled strength and weakness in it—there was also an underlying, pervasive melancholy.

And he looked ill. His very tall, spare form drooped, while nervous agitation was visible in a variety of spasmodic movements ; indeed it was so obvious that he was suffering physically as well as mentally, that the presiding judge more than once said kindly, "If you are fatigued, Mr. Parnell, pray be seated."

"I thank your lordship, not at all," replied Mr. Parnell, —but he had to grasp the rail in front to steady himself.

The Attorney-General, Sir Richard Webster, was not so considerate. Indeed he was scarcely civil. His "Attend to me, sir!" or "Are you following me, sir?" rang out frequently in a harsh note that fell disagreeably on one's ear.

I had been brought up to think the pestilent Parnell all that was bad, and though such views had become modified by contact with many sorts and conditions of political friends, I scarcely liked to own to myself that my sympathies were with him. Whether he had written the shocking letter or not did not seem to me to matter very much.

Do such things ever matter to a woman? The sinner's guilt may be proved, but if he is a loveable sinner she loves him all the same. She is sure he has acted upon some momentary impulse and is already in the throes of repentance. Her very heart goes out to him in his supposed agony of humiliation and remorse.

The Irish leader's expression was so sad as to warrant a suspicion of this—yet of course I learned afterwards that it was wide of the truth. He was simply in despair of being able to prove his innocence,—and to my indignant view it was horrible to have him tortured by that rude Sir Richard's sneering voice and subjected to his look of withering contempt.

Whispering something of this in my brother's ear, he corrected me with good common-sense ; "It's all *put on.* It's simply *business.* Everyone knows that."

"Well, I think they are all very ill-behaved," rejoined I —for others among Parnell's opponents were demeaning themselves in a manner calculated to annoy and confuse him. Often when he was on his feet they kept up a Babel of sound in his vicinity, talking and laughing with scarcely an attempt to moderate their voices.

And he bore it with a patience wonderful to see. Hour after hour I watched him unweariedly, and found my eyes fastened on that thoughtful, mystical countenance with ever-increasing interest. There were many as well as I, many infinitely above me, who felt the same.

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Poor, bewildered, flustered Mr. Macdonald, the worthy manager of the *Times*, taken out of the dignified rut of his daily life and thrust into the glare of publicity as an important and powerful witness, was as a hermit-crab torn from its shell.

If Parnell wore something of a martyr's crown in his followers' eyes, the unhappy Macdonald had no such consoling halo. He simply looked idiotic.

And his pitiable collapse evidently afforded a gleam of hope to the wretch who had duped him. Pigott's shifty eyes which had been here, there, and everywhere, scanning countenances on every side, were now concentrated on the trembling old grey-beard in the witness-box, and a wan smile played on his lips as he heard the faltering replies and reluctant admissions. Was it possible that he might escape by dint of these after all?

Things went the other way, as we all know now,—but at this point of the trial there was undeniable consternation in the camp of the Parnellites, and their leader it was said owned to those in his confidence that he had "Despaired," as I said above.

Poor Macdonald! He had indeed a dreadful time of it. He was a man of the highest integrity and honour, and the *Times* was his earthly all. I have heard my husband who knew and greatly respected him, say that the blow to its prestige proved to be actually the death-blow to this faithful member of its staff.

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Through it all Mrs. Gladstone kept on chumping biscuits out of a paper bag on her lap.

She was hungry ; it was long past luncheon-time,—but leave her seat she would not, well aware that she might never regain it if she did. Some one brought her a bag of biscuits, and the hardy old lady demolished them in the face of everybody—and some of us would have been very glad to have dipped a finger into that bag too.

"Do you know what o'clock it is?" murmured my brother, after a furtive glance at his watch an hour or two later, "I'm *starving*."

I was tired and stiff, oh, so stiff with sitting motionless wrapped in rigid attention for such a length of time—and yet was loth to go, loth to lose what might be yet to come, —and only when it was pointed out that nothing more of import could take place that day did I yield to his urgency, —when I too found I was starving!

But oh, what joy! We were stealing through the hall, expecting nothing less than to hear any more of the Parnell Commission, when some one ran after us, and it was Mr. Henry Hannen again!

His kindest of fathers had sent by him a fresh order for the sitting next day.

That I will not attempt to describe. The house was packed to suffocation. My husband, who was able to come this time, pointed out to me new dignitaries and celebrities struggling in the dense mass below—(we were in the front row of the gallery this time)—and at last not a square inch of room was to be found anywhere.

And we waited and waited. And it came out at last. There could be no trial. Pigott had fled!

Like a peal of thunder after a lightning flash came Sir Charles Russell's famous denunciation of "*A foul conspiracy.*" In less than an hour it was being yelled up and down the London streets. The reporters literally swam for the doors on the shoulders of the crowd.

Ha, Sir Richard Webster, whose turn is it now to look sarcastic? Oh, my dear Mrs. Gladstone, you and your paper bag should have been here to-day! *That* the Lord Justice-General of Scotland? He is clapping his hands and shouting like a school-boy!

The uproar is terrific—and universal.

I had a note from Lord Hannen that night, "Thank heaven, my nauseating labours on the Bench are over, and I can sit down in peace to read 'A Mere Child.'"

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Parnell, I was told afterwards, was not in private life quite the pensive visionary my fancy painted him on this memorable occasion.

He was not a saint we all know—but I was surprised to hear that he could be arrogant and pretentious in petty ways—the ways in which a *gentleman* is usually punctilious not to be so.

As an instance of this I was told by a notable cricketer of his day that he once had personal experience of an undignified proceeding connected with cricket, which was certainly "Not Cricket" (if a pun be permissible), on the part of the Irishman.

Parnell was a member of a club in Ireland, one of whose rules it was that no member should ever play against it.

A match was in prospect and Parnell had not been asked to play for his side.

He was found on the previous day practising on a private ground.

"Hollo? I did not know you were playing for us to-morrow?" said a fellow-member of the club.

"I am not, but I am playing against you," replied Parnell.

He was remonstrated with by the Captain of the Eleven and others—but to no purpose. Play he would, and play he did—and had to resign his membership of the club in consequence. "Parnell thinks he is above rules," said an apologist—"but it is always a pity to think that."

On the other hand Parnell had, as I suppose we all know, partisans who were ready to think everything right that was said or done by this extraordinary man. That he had a magnetic personality none could deny. It affected even such men as Cecil Rhodes, who after a prolonged interview and discussion of many subjects, wrote to his sister Edith (from whom I had it), that Charles Stewart Parnell was the "Most reasonable and sensible man" he had ever met.

The attributes did not, I must own, seem appropriate, but coming from Mr. Rhodes they were worth recording, also something else that Edith Rhodes related. The two had talked in her presence, and she remembered Parnell saying, "Why, Mr. Rhodes, do you take such an interest in Irish Home Rule? What is Irish Home Rule to you? What is Ireland to you?"

"My interest is an Imperial interest," replied the Empire-Maker. "I believe that Irish Home Rule will lead to Imperial Home Rule"—and then they set to work to argue it out, narrated the sister, "for my brother would never let a thing go until he had argued it out."

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Here it was cropping up again, that proud, adoring "*My brother!*"

And Cecil Rhodes might well be the "*My brother*" of his people—though as I never met him I must confine my present remarks to the solitary member of his family whom I knew at one time fairly well.

A most original and surprising creature was Edith. On the far-famed links of St. Andrews, clad in a very short grey flannel coat and skirt, with a straw sailor-hat and gaudy club-ribbon surmounting her cropped head and large, honest, red face, she was during her stay there one summer, one of the sights of the place.

Though short and stout—extremely stout—she would, stick in hand, march round the links at least once and sometimes twice a day; and when an interesting match was on would keep up with the attendant "Gallery," never letting go her hold of the rope to the bitter end.

I once saw her fall flat on her face in a sandy bunker—she rose laughing!

Her good humour and bonhomie were such that she was a favourite wherever she went, and could assemble a party for luncheon or tea simply by shouting invitations from the window of her lodgings to such of her acquaintance as passed along the road in front.

One day I was on the other side of the road, and it was broad, and there were carts between—but Edith's voice rose above the grinding of the cart-wheels. "Dearest!—I say—dearest!" (I believe she had forgotten my name, but it was me she meant.) I stopped and waved recognition.

"Come in to luncheon," she bellowed. "I've got Captain Marshall here, and the Younghusbands—and *he's* going to talk Thibet. There's Lady Limerick! Bring her with you. There's enough food for all. If there isn't, Marshall says he'll go without."

Why she called him "Marshall" no one could divine. If she had said "Robert" it would have been natural enough, for they were great friends and so inseparable that he openly declared he could do no work when the counter-attraction of "The mighty Edith" was so great.

He was about to produce his play "The Second in Command" and actually did leave St. Andrews sooner than he had meant to do, in order to give his whole mind to it. Miss Rhodes' talk was so brilliant and her company so congenial that he found himself unable to resist idling by her side, and would even forego a round of golf on the Royal and Ancient Course in order to putt with her on the Ladies' Links, where her putting was, to be frank, beneath contempt.

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But how well she could tell a story; here is one of hers.

A young man she knew was in love with a girl, but papa was obdurate; "Nothing of the sort. You don't come hanging round here till you prove to me that you are prepared to settle ten thousand pounds upon my daughter. That is the least I will agree to in the way of settlement."

This was rather a facer for the fond lover, though he had a good income it so happened that loose cash was not plentiful in his pockets.

It chanced however that he met a friend in whom he confided and who proved a very friend in need, for he said, "Suppose you try a little spec.? I'll buy you some 'Brushes!'"

"All right," quoth the disconsolate one;—but what was his amazement when only ten days later he received a cheque for the ten thousand so urgently needed, as the result of buying "Brushes."

"Queer," he thought; but there was the cheque, so he flew on wings to the girl's father.

The father, very bland all of a sudden, inquired affectionately. "But how, my dear boy, did you get this money so quickly?"

"It really *was* rather wonderful," rejoined the other, innocently. "A friend of mine, a very clever fellow who knows the ropes, bought some *brushes* for me as a speculation. I don't know what kind of brushes they were—hair, or nail, or tooth—but it is extraordinary the demand there must be for them!"

"You—!" murmured the father.

But the next day he sent his broker word to buy for him as many shares as could be got in Brush's Electric Light Company.

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Edith Rhodes had a sort of watch-word, "Now, how *true* that is!" She would plant her hands on her knees, lean forward and look you earnestly in the face—"Now, how *true* that is!"

She made you feel that your trite remark had in it a subtlety worthy of a Solon. However one day I baffled her.

"This is a very utilitarian age," said I, in my wisest manner. "I heard lately of a boy of eight who would have put to shame many a mature man. His mother had the misfortune while cutting the family bread-and-butter to cut off the tip of her finger also. After it had been attended to and the pain somewhat assuaged, her little son drew near, his eyes fixed on the bit of finger overlooked upon the floor. 'Can I,' he said, 'have this for my blackbird?'

"It was wonderful, was it not? Such coolness, such thrift! How proud the poor suffering parent must have been to think that she had given birth to such a political economist in embryo!" "Now, how *true*—" began Edith from force of habit, but then she stopped and her rich full-toned laughter rang out joyously, "I believe you are laughing at me!" There never was a more good-natured woman.

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I went with her once to hear a debate in the House of Lords, and as we were coming away we fell in with Lord Sherbrooke—better known to the world as "Bob Lowe."

He seemed glad of something to do, for the debate was of no importance, and we went out upon the terrace to get some fresh air.

Presently Lord Sherbrooke was nodded to by a passing acquaintance and turned to us with an amused look. "I was wondering if that man would slip out of my way to-day or not? But the fact is he *is* such a fool—let me tell you about it. You don't know him?"

No, neither of us did.

"That's all right," said Lord Sherbrooke, gaily, "then there's no harm in telling. But look at him for a moment—do you see what a strut he has? Now you'll appreciate the story. He caught hold of me as I was walking across the yard yesterday, and as we passed out of the gates a workman who had had a drop too much, lurched up against us. Now my pompous friend has no idea of having his sacred person lurched up against. He thinks himself enough of a swell to be known and made way for wherever he goes. So he went for the workman angrily. 'Get out of my way, fellow. Don't push up against me. I'm a member of the House of Lords.'

"At this, the British workman jeered: 'Are yer now? Yer don't say it? I've 'eard of yer, and I've 'eard as 'ow yer were a precious fool.'

"Any one else would have laughed, but not so my companion—not a bit of it," continued Lord Sherbrooke, with his eyes on the unconscious object of his story—"he was only more indignant. 'You are drunk, man; let me pass,' said he.

"'Drunk?' repeated the man. 'Drunk, am I? Well, it ain't no matter if I be, for I shall be all right to-morrow, but as for you, you'll still be a precious fool!'

"I wonder if he suspects that I'm telling this," wound up our companion, suddenly moving his chair round. "Perhaps it would be desirable to point out the beauties of the river?" suiting his actions to the words.

But after a minute he stole a glance round to where a portly form remained motionless a few yards away, and a gentle complacency overspread his own Albino countenance.

He turned to Miss Rhodes and me. "I should not wonder if that honest workman has done me a good turn. It seems not improbable that I shall never again be troubled with the attentions of the most egregious ass in either House."

CHAPTER XXV.

The Turkish Ambassador, Rustem Pacha—He finds it "very amusing" to meet funerals—The wheels of his carriage are round or flat according to circumstances—Lady Bagalley's singing in church—Mr. Russell Lowell's hood excites interest at an Oxford ceremony—Queen Victoria holds that Miss Jean Taylor is disqualified by her sex for the post of Poet Laureate—Lord Herschell has his private thoughts on the subject—The Diamond Jubilee—My last glimpse of Victorian London.

Among familiar figures in the London world towards the close of the Victorian era was that of the Turkish Ambassador, Rustem Pacha.

He was very old—to his infinite grief and shame—but gallantly strove to hide increasing feebleness of body by gaiety of spirit. His small, shrunken frame and withered face must once have possessed singular grace and beauty, and he still adored grace and beauty and loved to surround himself with the young and fair—indeed the younger they were the more did the aged Ambassador sigh to think he could no longer find favour in their eyes—but even as it was, society had still for him a charm. He loved to frequent it; he could not bear to be debarred from it.

On one occasion when a death in the family of "The Sultan, my Master" precluded his presence at a garden-party, he forbade any member of the *personnel* at the Embassy from attending it, though some of the young and insignificant secretaries had hoped to slip off thither unobserved—and he saw to it that he was obeyed. His jealous surveillance was not relaxed till the affair was over. I had this from one of the disappointed boys himself.

Rustem Pacha came often to our house, and we loved to have him come.

He was the most delightful of guests, he never seemed tired, nor bored, nor ready to go away. At the close of a long afternoon when as it happened his carriage did not come for him at the appointed hour, he felt, or feigned, glee at its delay. "My carriage-wheels," he said, "are round when I wish to go, and flat when I wish to stay. They are very flat to-day." On a similar occasion as he walked lingeringly up the lawn to the house, (we were living in an old Essex house, now no longer in existence) he turned as he reached the top of the bank, and his eyes rested on the golden Western sky. "There," he said, "sets the sun on one of the happiest days of my life." By such exquisitely tactful and gracious sayings who would not have felt touched and honoured?

Cranbrooke Hall was a relic of the past, and though the domain was itself untouched during our residence of thirteen years there, it was too near London and the vilest part of London to escape animadversion from many of our friends.

We were supposed on first going there to have "Buried" ourselves. We were upbraided for the interminable distance it was to Liverpool Street Station, also—to enter into details—for the stench of soap-works on the train journey to Ilford—while those who elected to drive down found the road depressing to their spirits by reason of the multiplicity of funerals wending their way to the two great cemeteries of the East End.

Those funerals were, I must own, a source of shame to us; and as Saturday was a great day for them, it did seem hard that Saturday was the day invariably fixed upon by people for offering to come and see us. One Saturday we had smarted beneath the complaints of some rouged and powdered dames who reviled the heat, the dust, the ugliness of the never-ending small rows of newly-built houses, and worst of all the funerals. They never seemed away from funerals!

Even Lord Herschell, our dear Lord Herschell, as he took his hat off and drew a breath of relief, murmured "It was coming through Purgatory to Paradise."

But what had Rustem Pacha to say about it? My husband advanced apologetically; "I fear the drive was very unpleasant, Excellency? They tell me the road was blocked with funerals."

"Yes, there were many funerals. I found it very amusing," said His Excellency, cheerfully.

Every Christmas my five daughters received each a large box of chocolates directed in Rustem Pacha's own handwriting, and inside were the names of each, "With Rustem Pacha's love" also written by himself. It was therefore perhaps not so very unnatural that the most youthful of these recipients should take it for granted that her friend had done still more, and should be found hunting about among the splendid contents of her splendid box, murmuring, "I wonder if Rustem's put me up a third layer?" When laughed at by her elder sisters she still maintained that he must have had something to do with the selection, for he had asked her what kinds she liked best?

Affectionate as he was to those he loved, the old man could be the most arbitrary of tyrants at home. "Do go up and see him," said Madame Morel Bey, the charming wife of the First Counsellor at the Embassy. "Perhaps you can do something with him. He is beyond me to-day."

"What is wrong? What is the matter?" asked I.

"He is tired out, but of course won't own to it. He wanted to get away early from the Drawing-Room, and his carriage could not be got at, and he was kept waiting. There has been a great row, and he has dismissed all the men! Now he is sitting exhausted over the fire in his own little den, and if you will let me take you there, your beautiful camelias may divert his thoughts, for he has often spoken of the sight they were when last he was at Cranbrooke."

"And we have often spoken of the fright he gave us," said I.

For in the teeth of all remonstrance the feeble old man had insisted on going up a ricketty ladder to view the show of blossom in our camelia-house, and we had momentarily expected a catastrophe. I thought the camelias might now come to the Pacha, as the Pacha could no longer go to them. I went up to the little room, and found him as Madame Morel Bey said, utterly exhausted and wailing dismally. "I am old; I am neglected; nobody attends to me properly now. Did you hear about these scoundrelly servants of mine? They were so vain of their new liveries, wanting to show them off to the girls"—here he had to cough.

"Surely you sympathise with them, Excellency? Your liveries are so magnificent—"

"They will not have them to show a second time. I have dismissed them, every one. They go at once—to-morrow."

"Not the *coachman*, Excellency?" I had had a hint on this point. There was a state function the next day, and it would be next to impossible to procure in time a new coachman fit to drive an ambassador's carriage.

"My coachman is the greatest dronkhard in London," said Rustem, still infuriate. "He is hardly ever sober." He paused, and looked slily. "But dronk or sober he knows how to drive *me*. Well-well. We shall see—we shall see."

The coachman continued to drive him to the end of his days.

* * * * * * * * *

One of the most loveable men I ever knew was Sir John Hanham, for long the Apparator-General of the Diocese of Canterbury. It is a part of the office to throw down the gauntlet at an episcopal consecration, and challenge anyone to show that the Archbishop or Bishop about to be consecrated is not a fit and worthy person for the appointment. Sir John's challenging was at one time regularly responded to by the voice of a Mr. Kensit, who was then discovered on his feet ready for a brawl, but this had to be postponed and usually fizzled out. Kensit's son succeeded to the business on the death of his father, but we do not seem to hear anything of him nowadays. I was however a witness of the painful scene on several occasions, owing to the kindness of Sir John, who thought we might be interested, but we did not like it after the first. Sir John himself was once characterised as "The most clerically-minded of laymen" and told us he knew or had known a hundred-and-fifty-two bishops, and he had got most of their names in his birthday-book! Oh, that pathetic little birthday book; what a tale it told! There were names, the highest in the land, cheek by jowl with that of a poor school-marm in some obscure New England village, or a stewardess on a coasting steamer off Japan—all were alike to him.

In a little book I once wrote, entitled "Cheerful Christianity," I find this passage:

"Who does not know some quiet man or woman to whom they can point, saying, '*That* one is always the same, whoever is there or not there; *that* one is never carried away by the excitement of the moment, made rude and rough and odious because of things going wrong, or contrariwise unduly and noisily elated because fortune is kind; *that* one never drops the little attentions paid at the first, never omits to notice the humblest arrival, nor to attend to the dullest and least coveted companion; *that* one may be counted upon to fill the place that others shirk; to toil in the rowing of the heavy boat; to trundle along the slow horse; to take a bed anywhere if rooms are needed; to hear out the longest-winded narration from which every other auditor slips away; to carry the rugs and wraps that nobody else remembers (or wishes to remember); *that* one is never affronted and surly, nor on the other hand pushing and obtrusive; that one, in a word, hath his heart filled to overflowing with that beautiful and holy Charity which "Doth not behave itself unseemly."'" And I find against this passage—written thirty years ago—the name of Sir John Hanham.

* * * * * * * * *

"We are going down in a party to see some delightful people receive degrees at Oxford," wrote Mary to me one day. "Mr. Russell Lowell will be one of them, Mr. Oliver Wendell Holmes another. And the Brownings and Mrs. Proctor, and Mr. Palgrave will be there, to say nothing of others you and I both know and like. And we are all invited to dine with the Master of Balliol, and the Sandersons will do the rest. Come with us!"

Of course I went—indeed, the Sandersons had already invited my husband and me, but he (Directors' Meeting intervening as usual) could not go. I should therefore have refused also but for Mary's invitation which was too tempting. Lord and Lady Herschell joined us at Paddington Station, as did Mr. Holmes and his daughter Mrs. Sargent, who had come from Edinburgh for the occasion.

I looked with much interest at the distinguished author whom I had never seen before, though I knew him well as "The Autocrat," "The Poet," and "The Professor." He was a very little man, but though I remembered that Kingsley had said of him that he looked like an "Inspired Jackdaw" it did not strike me as a particularly happy piece of portraiture. Mrs. Sargent was very American, with a strong accent, and at first I did not take to her as she answered everything that was said curtly, and seemed more inclined to take observations of the English landscape than of her fellow-travellers,—we felt, at least I did, aggrieved, like the little girl whose astronomer behaved similarly with regard to the sky, though when I learnt what was at the bottom of the young madam's ungraciousness, she had my full sympathy. Finding me next to her, and being unable to keep her feelings to herself, she confided, "I was told to be sure to dress *quietly*, as that would be correct for this occasion—and now I see you and your friends in such pretty frocks, I feel quite ashamed of my dowdiness. And I really have some very pretty frocks too in my trunks!"

Truth to tell, a beaded black silk on a brilliant June day did not look smart, and it *was* rather hard to have been forced into it against her will; so we had it out, and she felt better and soon grew quite pleasant.

Her father told us a story of Yankee repartee which I will give here.

A gentleman was driving his dog-cart along a lane, and was met by another driving his, and the lane was narrow and both horses fresh.

"Get out of my way!" shouted the first-comer.

The other hesitated.

"Take your brute down there!" proceeded the angry man, "take him on to the grass, or I'll serve you as I served a fellow yesterday who refused to get out of my way."

Immediately the other descended and led his horse aside, then looked up to say tremblingly, "What did you do to that man?"

"I got out of *his* way!" shouted the trickster over his shoulder as he rattled away.

* * * * * * * * *

Mr. Holmes told us of something that happened to him on his journey from Edinburgh.

A fellow-passenger with whom he had struck up a sort of acquaintance, put into his hands a manuscript with the request that he would read it as he sat opposite, as he, the stranger, wished to see the effect it had upon him? "This extraordinary request almost took my breath away," said the "Autocrat"; "it was more than human nature could stand, but as the man was quite serious—and had moreover given up to me his own superior seat in the carriage—I could not say what I thought. So I just made an excuse to get out and get into another compartment. If I had been in my own land it would not have surprised me, I own—but here!"

"Oh, we can be very impertinent even here!" laughed Mary.

As we passed Windsor Castle she asked the Herschells to tell of their "Dine and sleep" visit there two days before, as it might interest the Americans, which it certainly did.

"I don't know that the Queen herself said anything worth repeating," said Lord Herschell, considering, "but as you are both friends of Miss Ingelow"—to Mary and me—

"Miss Jean Ingelow? The poetess?" cried Mr. Lowell, who had borne a part in the Windsor discussion, "Was she there with you?"

"No, she was not at Windsor," Lord Herschell replied, "but she was spoken of there, and by no less a personage than Her Majesty. The Queen turned to me at dinner and said, "I have had Miss Ingelow's claims to the Laureateship put before me, and I admire her poetry extremely, but I do not consider that a woman can properly fill the post of Poet Laureate."

"Had you been Carlyle you would have argued the point," said Mary.

"Possibly, but not being Carlyle, I knew better than to say a word. All that there was for me to do was to bow acquiescence, and keep my thoughts to myself."

"And those were?"

"That if one woman can fill the post of Queen of England and Empress of India, another might be trusted to write a Royal Ode now and again!"

* * * * * * * * *

When we arrived at Oxford we found an escort waiting to conduct us to the Sheldonian Theatre, where the undergraduates were already assembled, merry and noisy as usual.

They greeted a Mr. Pope with roars of "No Popery!" and Oliver Wendell Holmes was evidently the greater favourite.

"Did you come, sir, in your One Horse Shay?" demanded a voice, and "Yes, yes. Where's the Shay?" cried a chorus. "Where's the Shay—oh, where's the Shay?—the wonderful, wonderful One Horse Shay?" all singing and cheering and whooping, whereat the "Autocrat" beamed with pleasure.

The Vice-Chancellor was bidden to "Speak up," and not "Try to imitate Irving"—and Lord Herschell, who started to speak before his time, was held back by four functionaries, while a lively youth bellowed, "Let him have his head!" as if he had been a restive horse.

It was all so gay and good-humoured that I think the old men liked it as much as the young ones.

Then followed the incident of Mr. Lowell's gown. Mr. Lowell's gown instead of being the usual combination of scarlet and magenta (save the mark!), was something still more hideous. What ought to have been magenta, was magenta *gone bad*, and we all wondered how America could have invented a colour so loathsome? That it was an American University gown no one doubted.

By-and-by however the truth came out. The gown was no alien gown, it was a compatriot of all the other gowns, it should have been similar to them in all respects but—it had been washed, and run in the wash!

Mr. Lowell himself unable to resist the joke against himself, told the tale openly.

With true Yankee 'cuteness he said he had hired the garment at some cheap, unknown place in London, instead of waiting to obtain it from the accredited source at Oxford, considering that he "Would save a few dollars by the transaction."

He did save ten shillings, but as Mr. Browning informed us, "That silk won't wash, and Lowell's gown has been washed—and now you see why it looks so pitiable!"

Although Mr. Lowell carried it off well, as well as any man could, I think he did not secretly plume himself on his economy and was glad when he took off his robe of honour.

* * * * * * * * *

Of this Oxford ceremonial I must own I retain no very distinct impression as a whole. There was so much to be seen as well as to be done that every moment was occupied, and no one could stop to think of anything.

Occasionally, however, I had like Dr. Jowett "Glimpses of the obvious." I saw how thoroughly the Master of Baliol himself was enjoying this rally of intellectual forces upon his own ground, how hospitably and incessantly he trotted from one to another, his short, rotund figure never seeming to be in any one place for two minutes together—and in contrast how the noble brow and deep-set eyes of the Regius Professor of Physiology seemed to belong to a being apart from it all, while yet every line of his countenance breathed kindness, benignity, humanity.

I say "Humanity" because of the false and cruel attacks to which Sir John Burdon-Sanderson was constantly subjected during his later life. Again and again he was able to disprove these rabid statements, and as constantly were they renewed,—but those among whom he lived and worked, revered his name—and on that day when Oxford honoured it he looked quietly happy, yet as I said wore an unconscious air of detachment, as of one unaccustomed to such gay scenes.

Lord Herschell, who had a great affection and admiration for his brother-in-law,—in spite of thinking his humility "Ridiculous" on the occasion of the Academy Soiree—came up to him as he was sitting by me on a window-seat at the evening reception; "I was talking to Holmes just now, and Browning came up, and Holmes said to him, 'Mr. Browning, do you enjoy all the adulation you receive?' Browning seemed a little taken aback, but replied hesitatingly that it made him feel 'Profoundly humble,'"—(not that he ever strikes one as *looking* "Profoundly humble"—Lord Herschell laughed a little)—"and I must say I thought the American the honester man of the two. He said: 'Almost every day I get letters from strangers expressing admiration of my books. I don't know that such admiration is worth much, but I think I should miss the letters if they ceased to come!'"

* * * * * * * * *

"Holmes says it is fifty years since he was last in England," continued the Lord Chancellor, "and that hardly any of the literary men he met then are alive to welcome him to-day. He declared that he felt as if he had 'No business to be alive either!'—but it does not seem to depress his spirits, does it?" as the "Autocrat's" cheerful laugh broke out at the moment—"he is a bright little bird; I like him immensely."

* * * * * * * * *

Then Mary came up. "Mr. Lowell says that when he took his degree here, he could not find a college cap to fit him, and was so surprised, as he thought that Englishmen pride themselves on the size of their heads."

"Mr. Browning took up the gauntlet at once. 'I don't know about that, Lowell. At any rate *poets* are not supposed to have large heads.'

"And then they had quite a tussle," said Mary, laughing, "for Mr. Lowell said he never laid claim to being a poet, and Mr. Browning retorted, 'Then why did he write such good poetry? Mr. Browning also said that Byron's brain weighed seven pounds!'

"'But the big brain may be in a small head,' said Mr. Lowell. 'When I was in Edinburgh lately I heard that the street boys used to cry out when one of their professors came by—a man with an extraordinarily small head—"Eh, see to the mon wi' the wee heid an' the muckle *wut* in it!"'

"I left them declaring they would put the matter before a physiologist," said Mary—"for I wanted to tell you that John Bright is here. That is he sitting over there"—and she looked towards a figure familiar to us from portraits. But Mr. Bright looked old and worn, and I could scarcely believe that joyless face belonged to the once brilliant orator and fighter.

He slipped away early—but it was late ere our party left, and the moon was high in the heavens.

We walked to our various destinations—it seemed that this was the thing to do. But the dew was thick on the grass, and the gravel got into my shoes, and altogether that night walk across gardens and quadrangles was more pleasant in the retrospect than in reality. Romantic incidents generally are.

* * * * * * * * *

It seems fitting that these "Memories" should close with the last public function of the Victorian era—the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee.

All that can be said of it *as* a function, as a brilliant and impressive spectacle, as a striking tribute to the glorious and beneficent reign of the great Queen, has however already been said—so I will confine myself to a mere word. My husband was at his club, Arthur's, and our two sons had seats elsewhere, but our three elder daughters and I were among the fortunate guests of my cousin, Archdeacon Sinclair, then Archdeacon of London—and we participated in the service before St. Paul's Cathedral from the upper porch.

Early, early had we to be there, and a welcome shelter was that calm retreat from the roaring multitudes outside.

As the hours passed we occasionally left our seats to wander about inside, and in one of these peregrinations I paused to look down from an upper gallery, and beheld a sight never to be forgotten.

The light was dim as usual in the vast space of the building—but a single shaft of sunshine straying through an upper window illuminated a long row of white-robed, glittering figures noiselessly wending their way along the centre-aisle below.

It was the procession of churchmen about to take up their place in front of the great West Door.

Shoulder to shoulder, step keeping pace with step, yet with never a sound of voice nor of feet, they solemnly filed through, and the ray of sunlight now and then falling on a jewel or a piece of gold, made a momentary flash. As the last figure vanished, the ray of light faded away.

But did I say that the atmosphere was resonant before? What was it now? The bells boomed overhead; every tower in the vast metropolis, north, south, east and west, was pealing and chiming,—kettledrums were clashing, spurs jingling (strange that such a small, shrill note should be distinctly audible)—and the very walls on every side seemed to belch forth one continuous roar of applause.

There was "Bobs" on his white charger, the recipient of ever-renewed bursts of enthusiasm; there was the splendid Ames, his six-foot-eight regarded with a kind of proud proprietorship by every Tommy who lined the way; there were, oh, why attempt to say?

Far off we recognised a fresh note in the thunder that reverberated in the distance. We knew She was coming then.

And as the cream-coloured team in their trappings emerged slowly into view, and the form so familiar to many from childhood, bowed and aged now though with tears of pride and happiness streaming down her cheeks came among us as the beloved Sovereign of her rejoicing people, I think there could hardly have been one present who would have refused to say "God save the Queen!"

THE END

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